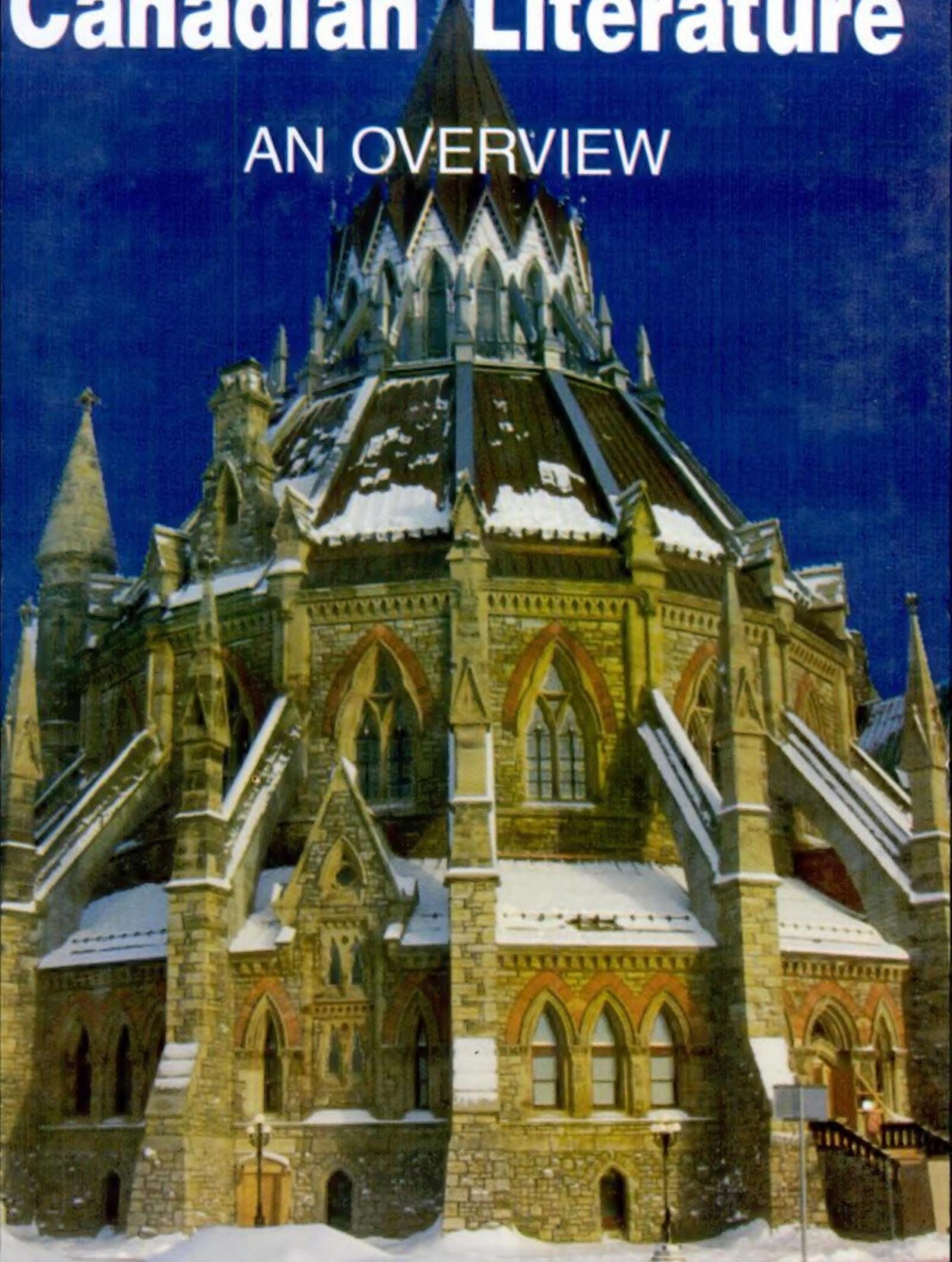


Canadian Literature

AN OVERVIEW



K. BALACHANDRAN



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Dr. K. Balachandran, Prof., Dept. of English, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar – 608 002 (Tamilnadu), a bilingual writer has published 12 books and a number of poems, research articles and reviews in India and abroad.

His first book was in Tamil **Annai Oru Agal Vilakku** (1974). His poetry anthology **For a Future & Heart's Chair** (1988, 1995) in the words of the late Sri K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, “reveal a lively sensibility and fair command over the so called alien language.” Edited the poems of an American Poetess, Dr. Rosemary C. Wilkinson in **Longing for You** (1988). Translated Dr. Narendrapal Singh’s award winning Punjabi novel **Ba Mulahiza Hoshiar** from English to Tamil, **Oru Puthiya Kathai** (1995) published by Sahitya Akademi. National Book Trust published his Tamil translation of Ruskin Bond’s novel **The Adventures of Rusty** as **Rushtiyin Veera Theerangal** (1995). He edited **Essays on Canadian Literature** (2001), published by Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly. **Critical Essays on Canadian Literature** (2003), **Critical Responses to Canadian Literature** (2004), **Critical Responses to Indian Writing in English** (2004), **Critical Essays on American Literature** (2005) and **Critical Essays on Commonwealth Literature** (2006) published by Sarup & Sons, New Delhi. Published his Tamil Essays, **Vazhum Kalai** (The Art of Living, 2004).

A Gold Medallist from Annamalai University, he was awarded Special Prize in the Students’ One Act Play writing competition in Birla Institute of Technology, Ranchi (1974). Received International Poet of Merit Award, Washington D.C. (1995), Michael Madhusudan Academy Award, Calcutta (1997) for his poetry Anthology.

His interests are: Indian Writing in English, American Literature, Canadian Literature, British Literature, Australian Literature, Commonwealth Literature, Journalism, Translation and Criticism.

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This one



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Canadian Literature: An Overview

Edit by

Dr. K. Balachandran

Prof. of English
Annamalai University,
Annamalai Nagar - 608 002, Tamil Nadu



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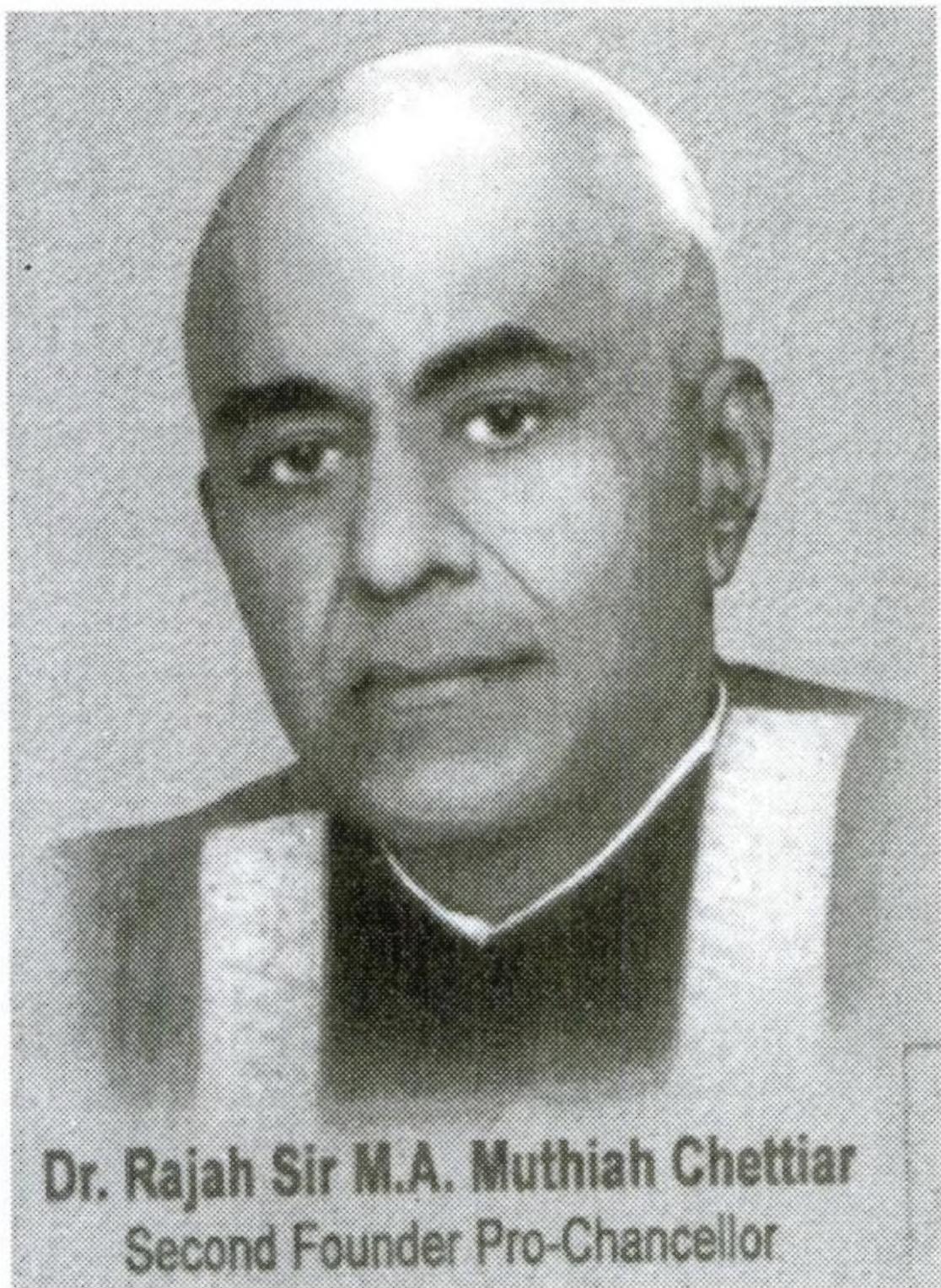
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Dedicated

To



Dr. Rajah Sir M.A. Muthiah Chettiar
Second Founder Pro-Chancellor

Annamalai University
Annamalai Nagar – 608 002
Tamil Nadu

Preface

As a humble effort, three books *Essays on Canadian Literature* (published by Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, 2001) *Critical Essays on Canadian Literature* (by Sarup & Sons, New Delhi, 2003), and *Critical Responses to Canadian Literature*, (Sarup & Sons, 2004) have been brought out to help the Students, Researchers and Teachers of Canadian Literature. Yet all sections want still more Critical Materials (Secondary Sources). Hence, this fourth Volume *Canadian Literature: An Overview* is in your hands. Immense happiness and satisfaction, it gives me, when I do this academic work for the propagation of Canadian Studies. I feel really grateful when I hear the overwhelming responses from all readers for my humble ventures.

Dr. G. Natanam in his “Portrayal of Landscape in Canadian Poetry” writes how the poetic imagination gets the much-needed fillip and inspiration from Nature. Canada, a former British colony is a vast prairie with the fierce summer and the freezing winter. Yet these have inspired the Canadian poets like Standish O’ Grady, Wilfred Campbell, Duncan Campbell Scott, F.R. Scott, A.J.M. Smith, Dorothy Livesay and P.K. Page and how the Environment has become an unavoidable theme in their poetry.

Dr. Pradip Kumar Patra in his “Women” must win back their bodies : A Study of the poems of Claire Harris traces out how Harris before writing a poem concentrates on a particular idea and then she gets a story for the poem and how most of her poems deal with the problems of injustice in the colonial, post-colonial regions and violence against women. Harris also shows the intensity of the social malpractices concerning women and how she looks at the entire situation of women in Canada.

Mrs. Arul Lily Sharmila in her “E.J. Pratt’s Communication of Progressive Thoughts on the Cultural Health & Prospective Future of Canada” details that Pratt’s poetic creation imparts pleasure and intellectual emotional sustenance to the readers promotes the cultural health of Canada; works manifest the communal vision of the people. Does his artistic achievement rest upon his blending of thoughts and emotions with symbolic energy? Does he recommend evolution and vision, the two poles of human life in his poetry?

Mrs. K. Ponni in “A Seismograph of senility in the poems of Raymond Souster” writes how Souster who represents the second generation of modern Canadian Poets, presents senility in a casual voice but with a deliberate tone of indictment. His description of senility is equal to what Shakespeare writes in **As You Like It** and Tagore writes in **Wings of Death**. The wheel of suffering revolves can senility be neglected. Senility has to be perceived in the right perspective to cross the sea of life.

Dr. J. Samuel Kirubahar in his “Feminist Streaks in Canadian Short Stories” categorizes how women are presented on three levels (i) as a common model, (ii) to mirrorise the ideal or the counter-ideal, (iii) a symbolic fulfillment of the writer’s needs. What are their attributes – Formlessness, passivity, instability, confinement, practicality, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy and incorrigibility? Do the short story writers present the self-destructive nature and damaging effects of male chauvinistic structures? Are they in search of a distinctive feminine identity?

Dr. Basavaraj Naikar in his “Margaret Laurence’s, **The Stone Angel** : The Story of a Woman with a will” argues how the novel deals with the life of Hagar Shipley, a fine example of the novelist’s understanding of human nature in general and feminine nature in particular. The delineation is about the protagonist’s three phases – girlhood, youth and old age. Will there be a temperamental incompatibility and conflict of personalities? Do you believe in a patriarchal setup of society? Is sex the only unifying force which keeps the marriage going?

Dr. (Mrs.) N.K. Prabhavathy in “Celebration of the Maternal subjectivity in Margaret Laurence’s **The Stone Angel**” writes how maternal narratives interpret woman in a different framework,

motherhood and mothering gained significance in the later stages of feminist movement. Womanhood and motherhood one they the same? What is the invisible link between a mother and her children? Is the stone angel in the Manawaka Cemetery a maternal icon? What is Laurence's vision and her narrative strategy?

Dr. (Mrs.) L. Judith Sophia in her "Journey Towards the Peaceable Kingdom : A Reading of Margaret Laurence's **The Fire – Dwellers**" shows how the novel sketches the physical landscape, geographical locals, social structures and familial relationship which set the background of the novel's action and also the interior mindscape of the narrator and protagonist, Stracey. How does the novel end - with Stracey's reconciliation with herself, with God and others? Does she look forward a new life with a new understanding?

Dr.(Mrs.) Prem Verma in her "Patterns of Isolation in F.P. Grove" writes how isolation and loneliness are inevitable and the twin themes in Canadian Literature. The isolation in Grove is not the result of physical factors only; their 'isolation' a part of mental make-up; the result of their particular responses to the fundamental realities of their lives. Are the idealists and visionaries easily accepted? Is their tension in marriage? Is it accompanied by sexual maladjustment or incompatibility?

Mrs. Suka Joshua in her "Atwood's Abysmal World and its Vanished Visionary Gleam" tells how eco-criticism cannot be neglected and natural environment plays a very vital role in the imagination of a cultural community ; how Atwood tries to ameliorate the crisis by speaking the unforbidden. Does she complain against, technology or the abuse of technology which leads to alienation, de-humanization and domination? Does she picture an ominous world? Does she warn mankind against ecological disaster? Has science robbed the earth of its riches and human beings of their emotions?

Dr. (Mrs.) P.R. Aruna Devi in her "Conflict and Compromise in Atwood's **Surfacing**" delineates as how the novel is an exhibition of the inner conflicts of a Canadian woman who falls a prey to the power politics of gender in a patriarchal society and the impact of neo-colonialism of her land. Is the artist's anger towards the neo-colonizers, the USA and the Britain? Or towards the Canadians who

allowed themselves to be repressed? What is the real formula for the protagonist to relive her life - acceptance and appropriation in lieu of renouncement and rejection?

Mrs. Sheila Royappa in “From Decadence to Confidence: Mapping the Mind of Margaret Atwood’s Protagonist in **Surfacing**” argues how Atwood’s heroines, after their initial innocent nature, finally awaken to the reality of their own self, her transformation from an inexperienced to a matured one; her psychological journey into her subconscious mind and surfaces by clearing herself up.

Dr. T. Doris in her “A Search for Identity in the Selected Novels of Rudy Wiebe” traces the Canadian Writers’ question “Who are we?” Is there Canadian Identity? Does he give voice to the marginalized culture group of Canada in his novels? Does he deconstruct the Mennonite religious beliefs, values and the socio-cultural history? Do Indians appear in all his Mennonite novels? Is his writing a valid mode towards a resolution of the Canadian crisis identity?

Dr. A. Mohankumar in “Recovering the Broken Threads of their lives: A Study of Jeannette Armstrong’s **Slash**” writes how the novel is a study of the native struggle to assert and affirm the Native perspective whereas *Slash*, an Okanagan Indian journeys through the perils of the dominant society’s culture. Does he accept his identity within the society at large? Is traditional culture the ground on which he must defend him? Who will give the correct version of a society’s history?

Mrs. T. Jayasudha in “Colonial Impact on the “Metis” : A Study of Beatrice Cullen’s **In Search of April Raintree**” shows how the novelist shows the devastating force of the myth of racial difference in the lives of two Metis sisters, one who passes for white, the other who asserts proudly that she is Native. Are the Metis the forgotten people or Aboriginal people? Has Cullen succeeded as an ethnic voice? Has the world realised the impact of colonialism on the Metis?

Dr. (Mrs.) R. Radhiga Priyadarshini in her “Native Literary Traditions of Canada – An Archetypal Analysis,” tells how the Native Canadians like the Hindus have certain beliefs regarding themselves and the Universe, which are to the European mind. Are

the narratives of native Canadians considered to be private properties of some tribes or initiated elders? Is the Sun worship a cultural symbol, which unites Canada and India? Is Native Canadian Literature an expression of higher spiritual truth? Is Hindu view of life has connection with Native Canadian Writing?

Dr. K. Chellappan in “Problematising Culture and History in Arundhati Roy’s **The God of Small Things** and Margaret Laurence’s **The Diviners: A Comparison**” writes how the two novels are the products of post-colonial cultures. Is **The Diviners** the Epic of Canada as it envisages a synthesis of the Metis and the Scotch strata of Canadian History? Is it an allegory of Canadian nation and its History? Does Roy’s **The God of Small Things** show the contradictions in the post-colonial India through the life of Keralite Syrian Christian lady and her twins as well as a dalit?

Mrs. G. Ruby Davaseeli in “Breaking the Tyranny of Silence in **The Handmaid’s Tale** and Shashi Deshponde’s **That Long Silence**” asserts how both the countries nurture the growth of unique identity in each case. The first one narrates the tale of quasi-military Republic (Gilead) that chiefly concentrates on human reproduction - presenting a modern form of woman hunting that aims at subjugating woman’s power, her fertility. The second one delineates the delicate swings of mood, the moments of joy and despair of the narrator, protagonist Jaya - a housewife and a failed writer.

Dr. Robert Gnanamony in “Lone Ant in a Flattened Anthill : A Feminist Reading of Sharan Pollock’s **Doc**” tells how **Doc** is a straightforward dramatization of the harrowing experience of a woman, who no longer wanted to be marginalized in the male-dominated world. Does the play depict the life of the Canadian middle class and the higher section of the Canadian society, where the old human values of the past are found to be meaningless? Is it about the frightening erosion of human values and the worth of human personality?

Mrs. PL. Visalakshi in her “Lizzie Borden’s Transformations in Sharan Pollock’s **Blood Relations**” writes how Pollock’s passion for re-structuring, re-visiting or re-presenting past events is embodied in the play. The protagonist charged for the murders, but acquitted is a challenge for the dramatist also. Is Lizzie Borden

guilty or not? What will be the reactions of a reader / spectator? Was there transformation in her life? Is there self-discovery and self-recognition? Will you sympathize Lizzie? Is the play a response to the paternalistic, dictatorial structure of families?

Dr. K. Balachandran's "Traditions and Transformations in David French's **Of the Fields, Lately**" details how traditions cannot be thrown away easily and transformations are a part of the family upbringing. Can there be a history either for a family or a country without tradition? If the parents and children behave tactfully, understand each other, then happiness is with them and Heaven is in their family. No more tension and misunderstanding.

Thus the twenty-one critical essays by scholars from many universities have thrown more light on the various aspects of Canadian Literature, which will definitely be helpful to the students, researchers and teaching communities, at all levels.

January 2007

K. BALACHANDRAN

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I sincerely thank **Dr. L.B. Venkatrangan**, the Vice-Chancellor and **Dr. M. Rethinasabapathi**, the Registrar and other Officials of Annamalai University for their gracious permission to edit and publish this book **Canadian Literature: An Overview**.

I express my sincere gratitude to all the distinguished contributors who responded readily to my invitation for contributing to and enriching this book.

I am very much indebted to **Dr. K. Chellappan**, Former Director, State Institute of English, Chennai who initiated me into Canadian Literature.

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I like to thank **Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute**, New Delhi, **Indian Association for Canadian Studies**, Canadian Embassy and all those who associate themselves with Canadian Literature for their constant inspiration and encouragement to me.

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Contributors

1. **Dr. G. Natanam**, Prof. of English, Govt. Arts College (Autonomous), Kumbakonam – 612001. Tamilnadu. (Bharathidasan University).
2. **Dr. Pradip Kumar Patra**, Reader and Head, Department of English, Gauhati University, Kokrajhar Campus, Kokrajhar-783370, Assam. (Gauhati University).
3. **Mrs. Lily Arul Sharmila**, Lecturer in English, Tagore Arts College (Annex), Thavallakkuppam, Abishekappakkam (Post), Pondicherry-7. (Pondicherry University).
4. **Mrs. K. Ponni**, Lecturer in English (SG), Govt. Arts College C.Mutlur and Post, Chidambaram – 608 102, Tamilnadu. (Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore).
5. **Dr. J. Samuel Kirubahar**, Lecturer in English, Department of English, VHNSN College, Virudhunagar – 626 001, Tamilnadu. (Madurai University).
6. **Dr. Basavaraj Naikar**, Professor & Chairman, Department of English, Karnatak University, Dharwad-580 003, Karnataka. (Karnatak University).
7. **Mrs. N.K. Prabhavathy**, Lecturer in English, (SG). Kerala. (University of The Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College, Calicut 673017 Calicut).
8. **Dr. (Mrs.) L. Judith Sophia**, Lecturer in English, Scott Christian College, Nagercoil-3, Tamilnadu. (Manonmaniam Sundaranar University).
9. **Dr. (Mrs.) Prem Verma**, Reader in English (Retd.), Sri Aurobindo College, Delhi. (Delhi University).

10. **Mrs. Suka Joshua**, Lecturer in English, Lady Doak College, Madurai 625 002, Tamilnadu. (Madurai University).
11. **Dr (Mrs.). P. R. Aruna Devi**, Lecturer (Senior) in English Institute of Distance Education, University of Madras, Chennai – 600 005.
12. **Mrs. R.C. Sheila Royappa**, Lecturer in English, S.A. College for Women, Pallathur, Tamil Nadu. (Madurai University)
13. **Dr. T. Doris**, Lecturer in English, Bishop Heber College, Trichy, Tamilnadu. (Bharathidasan University).
14. **Dr. A. Mohan Kumar**, Reader in English, VHNSN College, Virudhunagar – 626 001, Tamilnadu. (Madurai University).
15. **Mrs. T. Jayasudha**, Lecturer in English, Bharathi Women's College, Chennai – 600 108. (University of Madras).
16. **Dr. R. Radhiga Priyadharshini**, Reader in English, Vellalar College for Women, Erode, Tamil Nadu. (Periyar University).
17. **Dr. K. Chellappan**, Director (Retd.), 10A, Indian Bank Colony, II main Road, Ambattur, Chennai-600 053. (State Institute of English).
18. **G Ruby Davaseeli**, Lecturer in English, Bharathidasan Govt. College for Women, Pondicherry. (Pondicherry University).
19. **Dr. S. Robert Gnanamony**, Professor of English, Hindustan College of Engineering, Chennai. (Anna University).
20. **P.L. Visalakshi**, Research Scholar, Department of English, Avinashilingam Deemed University, Coimbatore – 641 043. (Avinashilingam Deemed University).
21. **Dr. K. Balachandran**, Prof. of English, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar – 608 002. Tamilnadu (Annamalai University).

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1

Portrayal of Landscape in Canadian Poetry

—Dr. G. Natanam

Canada as a prominent country has gained importance from the beginning of the twentieth century and it is more so in the context of its attempt to part company with the already well-established American poetry. It goes without saying that the poetic imagination gets the much-needed fillip and inspiration from the world of nature. In the case of Canada, a former British colony, the vast prairies, the freezing winter and the fierce summer have largely inspired the writers to come up with different types of literature. This article examines how the poets in Canada “have from time to time returned to the landscape for the stuff of their poetry.”¹

Standish O’Grady describes the winter season in ‘Lower Canada’ in the poem of that title. The country is presenting a sight full of “barren waste, unprofitable strand.” The land being unproductive is full of the frozen air. The winter season makes the scene in the country bleak and no wonder then that it can metamorphose dark brown stuff to white. There are forests with lot of useless lumber and fruitless trees. It is no breeding place for birds and only the bear survives here with “no better fare.”

Canada is known for its regions full of wilderness. During the winter season “the wild wilderness is rapt in snow.” As for the climate of the region, one has to brave Greenland winters which go on for seven long months in a year. There is no verdure anywhere and the brightness is usually “veiled amid the drapery of night.”

Wilfred Campbell in his poem ‘The Winter Lakes’ presents the dreary and dark landscape. It is a world of death where “waste and white stretch the great lakes away.” As the ice-winds blow, the griefs

of winter are heard. The thunders of wintry woe make the atmosphere looming and ghost-like. The picture of the moon glimmering above, the water surface with white colour, the shadowy shapes, lonely hidden bays, the rocky region with its utter blackness—all these are sketched by the poet quite in tune with the country's climatic surroundings.

Another poet, Duncan Campbell Scott comes out with the presentation of a typical Canadian prairie. Against the background of the double lines of silver-grey coloured clouds lie the gold-green wheat in a completely ripened condition. When the machine tills the soil, up goes the cloud of dust like a spirit coming out of the earth. The fallow field waits for the "break beneath the harrow." The sky casts a blue colour and all around is seen the "silver-grey in the poplar trees" and the "shadow in the slew."

F.R.Scott sings hopefully of the 'better tomorrow' even as settlements of people reach out to the length and breadth of the country. The mystery behind the land and its surface he could understand, though its articulation is not properly audible. In his view it is "inarticulate, arctic and empty as paper." The people slowly settle down amid the drone of the plane, scouting ice and the fast engulfing emptiness. The poet is full of hope, as he hears a deeper note from the mines and the scattered camps. Surely it is a language of life and this "full culture of occupation" will turn the dreary atmosphere in the present to a better future.

When A.J.M.Smith, a noteworthy Canadian poet, refers to the death of W.B.Yeats, the English symbolist poet, he never fails to mention the movements in the world of nature befitting the Canadian landscape. He begins the poem with an old thorn tree in a stony place. The stream running from the mountains has gone dry. The white sky is described as 'icicle-sharp kaleidoscopic', which blooms suddenly. Another description is that of the central dome of winter and night, where a wild swan springs to activity. Again the riding clouds on the sky surface produce a 'rhetorical tumult.'

From out of the dark emerges something concrete only to hold the centre stage thereby pushing everything into a state of glory. It reminds one of Shelley's immortal lines – "If winter comes can spring be far behind?" The stream on the Ben Bulben is now running with clear water, the twisted tree is now seen with flowers, the swan leaps into the air signifying the glory "not for an hour." There is

every indication that the dim and dark scenes will be left behind in readiness for "the tumultuous throng of the sky" and the white bird's passionate song.

The stormy climate comes for description at the hands of Duncan Campbell Scott in the poem 'The Forsaken.' Therein he describes the life of the Red man living in close contact with wilderness typical of Canada as a whole. In the tragic narrative the poet makes vivid the scenery as it is experienced by men and women of the region. It is the northern land far from the hunters. The climate is quite chill and a woman is found to be caught in the last hours of a great storm. The pity of it is that she has a sick baby too along with her. Her movement is like the twisted bark of the cedar, one of the largely grown trees in Canada. She has not succeeded in her attempt at catching fish the whole day.

However, Dorothy Livesay could read a message from the tree thus: "Aloneness is the only bliss."² She merges the opposites of fire and snow with the optimistic feeling that 'a green eternity' would result. This flesh and this hasty dress will have to be exchanged for a firmer and more lasting 'one unit.'

P.K. Page, the nationalist-conscious poet pictures the adolescent atmosphere wherein the lovers' motion is called "savage and swift as gulls." Other pictures brought vividly before us are hostile emptiness, partly sculptured stone, avenues in the dark, etc. In 'The First Neighbours' Page brings back alive the tricks of the dark forest. It is like a malevolent face flickering over his shoulder. He tries his best to take the cue from the "chapped tarpaulin skin." He learns that things have got to be endured and prediction for him is forever impossible.

Having presented the different pictures of the country as seen by representative Canadian poets, it is possible to conclude that the people as a whole are governed by the dichotomy of the glory and the darkness, the shining and the diminishing aspects of nature getting reflected naturally upon human life in general. Hence it may be fitting to round off the discussion with the remarks of Tom Marshall: "The Canadians began as cultural half-breeds. They had perforce to engage the environment, the outer storm, simply in order to survive. Poetry in their hands became a vehicle for that inner weather of a deeper emotional and intellectual intermingling with our North American place."³

NOTES

1. C.D.Narasimhaiah, **An Anthology of Commonwealth Poetry**, Madras: Macmillan, 1990, p. 156.
2. Dorothy Livesay, 'On Looking into Henry Moore,' **An Anthology of Commonwealth Poetry**, 1990, p.181.
3. Tom Marshall, **Harsh and Lonely Land**. Vancouver, 1974.

2

Women must win back their Bodies : A Study of the Poems of Claire Harris

—Dr. Pradip Kumar Patra

We've been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty; we've been made victim of the old fool's game: each one will love the other sex. I'll give you your body and you'll give me mine. But who are the men who give women the body that women blindly yield to them? Why so few texts? Because so few women have as yet won back their body. Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetoric, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence", the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word "impossible" and writes it as "the end". (Warhol, R.R., Herndl, D.P., ed., **Feminisms**, Rutgers: Rutgers University Press. 1997. p. 355.)

In both modern and post-modern thought, gender is best understood in the context of the larger problematic of identity and difference. Historically gender emerged as a category of analysis and cultural criticism in the second half of the twentieth century. Claire Harris, a Canadian poet writing in English tries to write the difference implicit in her sexuality into the literary text. What are

these subjective realities? How and why do they differ? In part at least they are rooted in biological difference. A woman's sexual experience is at a physical level different from a man's, while her experience as a bearer of children sets her totally apart from him. How she perceives the difference between what she knows them to be and the manner in which society represents them - these are among the factors that constitute her subjective reality.

In Canada multilingual situations prevail which seem to be the strong fountainhead providing an atmosphere of natural curiosity and natural inclination for undertaking formal and nonformal studies in literature relating to the experience of women. Currently Canada is home to more than 100 ethnic groups who speak 85 different languages, irrespective of the fact that Canadian literature basically involves the study of two main literatures written in two major languages, English and French. These two languages belong to the so-called founding nations, and share the same geographic space with vital but European roots of typically colonial origin.

Claire Harris was born on 13th June 1937 and brought up in Trinidad in colonial time. She got her B.A. from University College, Dublin, a post-graduate diploma in Education from the University of West Indies, Jamaica, a diploma in Mass Media and Communication from the University of Nigeria, Logos. She migrated to Canada in 1966 and settled in Calgary where she taught in a school for many years before becoming a full-time writer. Her concerns as a poet are three folds: to project through her poetry her experience as a black, as a woman and as a Canadian. To comprehend fully the colonial Canadian present, she could have insight from the colonial West Indian past - her land, which she properly understood and admired after reaching Canada. It gave her a perspective to correlate the past with the present, with their cultures and issues so well that despite being an autobiographical writer, she is the voice of entire ancestral heritage. There is a strong political note in many of her poems, which though understandably turn bitter at times, share the pain and humiliations of the black community. Harris experiments in various poetic forms and linguistic techniques to carry on her central themes, which obviously are related to the ideologies of colonialism and patriarchy.

Claire Harris has produced over eight collections of poems since her first volume, *Fables from the Women's Quarters* (1984), which won the Commonwealth Award for Poetry for the Americas Region. Her 1992 volume, *Drawing down a Daughter* was nominated for the Governor General's Award for Poetry. Her *Travelling to Find a Remedy* won the Writers' Guild of Alberta Poetry Award in 1987. Her work has been included in more than 70 anthologies and has been translated into German and Hindi.

Before writing a poem Harris concentrates on a particular idea, then only she gets a story for the poem. In one of her interviews she says,

First the idea comes and then I get the story. It is usually something which is on the news, and I spend a month or a year waiting for my subconscious to elaborate on it. At this stage I can sometimes see what the poem will look like on the page but I will have to wait for the right language and tone. Usually it is the first line and then the poem just flows. If it is a long poem, I put it away for a year or two, do some reading on the issues, then come back and really craft it and examine the thought. When I finally put it into a manuscript, I go on changing lines here and there for the year or so that the publication takes, until my publisher threatens destruction. (*Gender*: 97)

Many of Harris's poems deal with the problems of injustice whether it is in colonial or post-colonial regions or in violence against women. Even in, *Drawing down a Daughter*, a collection of personal poems on friendship, love and motherhood there are many references to the condition of African-Canadians. In her poem, 'Black Sisyphus' gender – based bias is very much evident. The feeling of protest and anguish takes a radical form in the poet's mind.

To propitiate the dreaming god at his centre
for months my father drove down green uneven.
roads to the capital where the tar flowed under
noonday heat in daily manoeuvres around new obstacles
to take form again in cold pale morning
he drove those roads in mutters searching through
the crumpled pathways of his brain while his

voice rose and stumbled in the sibilant argument
 he enjoyed with life he could not be
 convinced that being human was not enough
 that there was no bridge he could cross
 he would not 'forget de man' nor 'leave
 him to God' these were his sky/trees/
 his stress to name was he not greeted
 by all he passed naming from a wilderness
 of loss his fathers created this island garden
 he would not be cast our again he
 rode his right to words pointed and named
the road from one way of life to another is hard
those who are ahead have a long way to go
 missionary zeal could not stomach such clarity
 they damned him thundered fire brimstone the sin
 of pride thus my father and his letters
 raced weekly to the centre the apology
 won he stood nodded bowed strode in his own
 echoing silence out of lowered eyes/bells/incense
 the worn organ's cough out of village voices
 wheeling in cracked Kyries
 to stand on the church steps muttering :
it is enough to be a man today
 his fingers kneading my six year old hands
 as if they would refashion them

(Twentieth Century Canadian Poetry : 113-114)

Harris in her poem, 'Variations: One' implicitly speaks about the openness and freedom that she yearns for. The poem gives hints about the social, sexual and gender-based congestion and prejudice that the women suffer from. Nature stands for the life of innocence and freshness in the image of which women are made.

As this wind enters the eucalyptus
 so would I enter you in light
 stroking small rufflings the light shedding
 from me to gather in your trunk and stems

I now green as your leaves
You and I would shudder and rasp flutter
and tap hollow trunks together
so we would work in us then leave
Only that you and I would excel us
See how the eucalyptus glints taller
the wind gathers strength
beyond the river

(*Twentieth Century Canadian Poetry*:114-115).

Harris on the other hand, is conscious of the gender issues of the society and is of the opinion that the terms like ‘womanist’ or ‘feminist’ instead of promoting the cause of the women harm them. This sensibility is best expressed in one of her interviews in the book, *Gender, Text and Context*.

Most black writers and many writers of colour like the term “womanist” for its connotations of strength and the history of class, gender and racial oppressions contained in the general use of the word “feminist”. Among Africans in the Americans, “woman” meant not only someone grown but powerful. There was the received terminology of “Girl”, “Auntie” etc. for black women in one hand, and “lady” or “woman”, just as damaging, on the other. White women tend to think they came up with the word “feminist” so that’s that. For many academics, as for writers, it’s a question of power. The power of name. Personally, I think that division in the ranks is a gift to the “enemy”-in this case the male hierarchical structure, which continues to largely shape our world. (p.95)

Harris’ collection, *dipped in shadow*, includes two long poems, which is concerned with the important question of being born a woman. The two poems tell the stories of child abuse; in both the abuser is the father. “Woeman womb prisoned” is the story of a fifteen year-old girl child giving birth to her own father’s child. “Nude in an armchair” tells about two children, a girl and a boy whom their father utilizes for increasing sexual exploitation by the respectable men in the neighbourhood, till the pregnancy of the girl leads to exposure. The title of the first poem implies that woman is caught up in a biological trap. It is her sex that determines her

gendered existence. It is her possession of a womb of childbearing capacities that leads her to be “prisoned” or to be confined to the role of a child bearer and bringer up of children even in the normal course of life. When she is abnormally abused, it is her womb that creates for her consequences which the boy child escapes, however painful the trauma which he too undergoes.

Thus, Harris shows the intensity of the social malpractices concerning women in Canadian society. It is, however, to be noted that Harris in her poems goes above racial or ethnic origin. She remains very much within the common experiences of the women as a whole. The subjective realities of betrayed girl in one poem; betraying mother in the other, are women’s experience, different from men’s, which are written into these texts. Also written in is a strong sense of living with a woman’s body, prisoner in it, but poisoned by patriarchy, not by nature.

Harris is, however, not insensible to the entire situation in Canada in the broader context of which she looks upon the position of women. The West claims to acknowledge individual civil polity and human rights. But human right must mean more than freedom from physical harm and more than uncensored expression. It must come to mean the right to be whole. At this stage of human history, more than ever before, there is the need of the nation state to become a poly-vocal space. Anything less is a retreat from the truly civil state into what the West calls “tribalism” in Africa, and “nationalism” in Europe. In Canada since the population is drawn from the every corner of the globe, there is a need of the genuine, generous, countrywide debate on what it means to be human/to be a full citizen. Only then the Canadians can be truly Canadians. As there has been no such debate, there is a lack of genuinely civil polity. There is use of the rubrics, “multiculturalism”, “vertical mosaic”, minimum welfare payments etc. to avoid the ache that such a debate must bring. Things will have changed when the cultures in Canada become so inclusive that all Canadians can see their faces in it.

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3

E.J. Pratt's Communication of the Progressive Thoughts on the Cultural Health and Prospective Future of Canada

— *Mrs. Lily Arul Sharmila*

The creative compendium of Canada has its culmination in what was being composed in Great Britain with the progressive features of literature. The Canadian literary studies evolved as the unique creation, independent of both parental Britain and neighbouring America however it triumphed in assimilating and transforming the outer indebtedness into its own distinctive literary patterns of intrinsic values. The Canadian genius soon contemplated and obtained vision and poetic voices of purely their own.

“In a sense Canadian literature is an act of faith.”¹ the Canadian art is inseparably linked with human life and its tragic situations. There are transparent associations in them that Canadian literature gets vitalized by virtue of exploring several modes of expression. In conformity with multifarious ideas, based on new combinations of things and experiences in life, true artistic voices resounded through Canada.

The early period of Canadian world with its varied patterns of landscape, historical development, modified British social, political

customs the problems confronted by the people, the creation of administrative units, boundary issues, changing circumstances, whims and fancies of the politician all these get subsumed into what is called Canadian literature. Thus Canadian literature gained its significance with its incessant publications and impressive contemporary accomplishments.

Brown writes, "One can find the unique synthesis of dramatically varied locations called the Maritimes, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, British Columbia and Northern territories."²

These regions are realistically depicted with their distinctive life pattern, culture, ethos and literary conventions. These determinants triggered up the impressive literary activity with the union of fiery imagination and start realism. The huge literary output evidences the flowering up of so many talented poets, novelists and prose writers. Among them is E.J. Pratt, an outstanding literary figure of confederation group of Canada. Pratt, an illustrious poet dominated the literary scenario of the first half of the Canadian master spirits like A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott and A.M. Klein. The prime concern of this present paper rests on the valuable contributions made by Pratt to the Canadian poetic world. His pivoted position within Canadian stream of verse can be apprehended in terms of geographical and historical characteristics of Canada.

Pratt can be acclaimed to be an oral poet, a public poet, a poet of man and a responsive voice of his community and culture. He has been well informed of the oral tradition, proverbial philosophy and the stories of god and heroic people. His poetic voice gets tuned up to the regulated crescendo by his creative force and zest for expression. He was of the view that the universe is rationally ordered; so it is the task of the poet to impart a similar scheme to the work of art. Being hailed from a backward community with its strong tradition, Pratt could gradually make a grasp of the essential condition of ceaseless human encounter, perennial in the life of mankind. He was a son of a Methodist clergyman educated at Toronto concentrating on philosophy, psychology, theology and astronomy.

His craft of poetry is an emotional media of expression that makes the incommunicable communicable. The major works of him include **The Witches' Brew** (1925), **Titans** (1926), **The Iron Deer** (1927), **New Found Land Verse** (1928), **The Roosevelt and the Antinoe** (1930), **Many Moods** (1932), **The Titanic** (1935) **Brebeuf Brethren** (1940) **Dunkirk** (1941), **Still Life** (1943), **Behind The Log** (1947) **Towards the Last Spike** (1952), and **Collected Poems** (1958).

His Evolutionary Vision on Human Survival:

Pratt's poetic creation continues to impart pleasure, intellectual, emotional sustenance to the reading public. His creative endeavour aids him in promoting the cultural health of Canada for its prospective future. His poems tend to demonstrate the truth, which was evident to him in early and later periods in Canada. His works deliberately function as the manifestation of communal vision of the people. His literary productivity is thin until 1920; but they are known for the qualitative writings with intrinsic values. His poem 'The Stoics' emphasizes the stoic belief that need to suppress passion and promote all reason to guide the individual moral ethics thereby learn to endure the sufferings of life with fortitude.

"That cool unflowed retreat...."³ Pratt engages himself in verbal clowning and philosophical seriousness to propagate his poetic truth. He explores very studiously the root cause of man's misery in life. Man must discover its origin, its base, its causes and then its effects. Thus the works of Pratt make a critical evaluation of the monstrous forces in the life of man that forms the important aspect of his craft.

The myth of Sisyphus by Camus bears the similar viewpoint. A modern man determined to place a stone on the top of the mountain knowing very well that before he descends down the mountain, the stone will reach foot of the mountain. The implied meaning is that though human life seems to be nothing, abundant impressive and imposing features are to be explored by the sense of acceptance with what comes upon the path of life. Only the life can open out venues for human courage dissipating natural infirmities of mankind to face new challenges and promises. Such is the evolutionary vision Pratt cherished in his life-time.

Pratt has adroitly transmuted the Victorian assumptions and modern experiences into his literary texture. He bridges not only over the literary canon of nineteenth and twentieth centuries but helps in forming a canon between primitive and rural, sophisticated and urban living and tradition and modernity. His poems are drawn upon human life, experiences, attitudes and conflict between man and man, man and natural forces etc. He portrays a kind of phenomena, the human world in which insurmountable force and adversity are the two resisting sources. His major focus is on heroic action at a time, when such subject of heroism is considered to be an outmoded one among the higher literary circle. He yearned for establishing a kind of relativity between ancient and modern world. Often the modern events interest him. This can be best illustrated by his poems titled 'The Roosevelt and the Antinoe' (1930), 'The Titanic' (1935), and 'Dunkirk' (1941).

His narrative-cum-documentary poems confirm him to be one of the poets with remarkable poetic gifts. He is a scholarly poet who combines within himself the evolutionary moral thematic concern of *New Found Land Verse* (1923). this collection of poems has a strong bearing upon the conventional fashion though not suitable to the artistic taste of the public. His poetic maturity is increasingly evident in this collection. *New Found Land Verse* illustrates the meticulous designing of his shorter verses

"Tide and wind and crag
Sea weed and sea shell
And broken rudder. (*Canadian Literature in English*, 54.)

Ocean, wind and crag behave different when people are not present. The word pictures of these poetic jottings are superb. There is a dividing line between prose and poetry as it has been modeled upon 'free verse.' **New Found Land Verse** is invested with maritime imagery of Eastern sea board reflecting Pratt's fascination for the sea. "Salt as tears" denotes not the feeling for one's death but the trauma of human condition. 'Sea weeds', sea shell' and 'broken rudder' all these stand for the bold representation of nothingness of human life.

"The tides that run
Within the sluices of men's hearts." (*New Found Land*, 57.)

The blood vessels of human hearts figuratively reflect the confounded state of affairs around the human world. This is a typical illustration of maritime poem of Pratt providing sufficient background on navigation. Pratt proceeds to philosophize what he grasped during his contemplative hours with a prime object of associating his visionary directives and experiences to mankind.

“Not with that dull unsinwed treat of water
Held under bonds of move
Around the unpeopled shore.” (*New Found Land*, 58.)

The high-pressure between nature and the humans, the interaction between nature and people and nature without people are denoted here.

“Harmonies of new floods
Broken rhythm from old chords...” (*New Found Land*, 58).

With a perfect union of crescendo and musical patterns Pratt seeks to create the harmony between old and new, past and present. The subtle fusion of past and present to obtain evolutionary principles to which Pratt strives for is much evidenced in the poem **New Found Land Verse**.

The Empowerment: The thematic preoccupation with animosity of wild creature in the poem ‘Shark’ is unique. It makes a panoramic representation of the mechanical existence of the modernists. The ‘fish’ can be described in terms of mechanism, which metaphorically refers to the quality of human life. Pratt places, understands his experiences and gives it certain measure. This poem has a richness of texture as it reveals layers of meaning, pertaining to the human evolution. Symbolically, the wild creature’s ferocious efficiency connotes the might behind god’s creation. One is strongly reminded of the visionary poet Blake and his poem ‘The Tiger’ that reveals the power of god’s creation.

The artistic achievements of Pratt rest upon his blending of thoughts and emotions with symbolic imagery. He observes the world around him the common scenes and sights of the world claim his attention. He establishes a sort of relativity between the world of men and the world of brutes with the common base on power and vitality present there right from the hours of God’s creation.

The analogy of 'Shark' stands for the ferocious efficiency of wild creation. The poet through this image drives home to man's business a valuable piece of quibble that man is created with infinite faculty, power of apprehension and nobility in reason. And so he must brave his action, which marks the stages of evolution combined by his sense of individuality and corporative features.

The short lyrics of Pratt are very tightly packed and compressed with the noted controlled tone. 'From Stone to Steel' is the best example for his concise expression, one of the stylistic modes of the modern poets to conceive much in little spaces. "'From Stone to Steel' ranges from Java to Geneva, from Euphrates to the Rhine..." (**Canadian Literature**, 56.) Pratt draws literary sustenance from different spheres of knowledge such as archaeology, theology, history, geography and modern politics. His gigantic grasp over various branches of faculties is increasingly evident in his poems. They are the high sources of intrinsic poetic values to Pratt with drawn implications.

Pratt lays a greater insistence on the subtle unification of both physical evolution (material universe) and moral advancement, which are though uncertain in practical human living. This notion of need for illumination and enlightenment has been brilliantly captured in the poem 'From stone to steel'. Pratt's evolutionary vision is well concentrated through the means of effective word picture that debunks contemptuously the mechanical creation of objects invented by man.

"The civil polish of the horn
Gleams from our praying finger tips..."
(**Canadian Literature**, 58)

This refers to the sophisticated brutality masked by religion that reminds a sensitive reader of Milton's attack upon corrupt clergy. Pratt on his part is a voice for a distinct community and generation grappling the opposition between long practised, theological notion and the advent of scientific and technological boundaries of knowledge.

'From Stone to Steel' successfully produces the result that Pratt devised for the artistic virtue runs with moral righteousness and didactic strain. The civil performance emerges out of supplication,

the moralization, which stands in bold comparison with the delightful conversation of William Wordsworth with a leech gatherer.

“Stately speech, lofty utterance
Solemn order, measured phrases
Choice of words ...”¹ (*Resolution and Independence*)

‘From Stone to Steel’ finally concludes with the expected note of compassion and optimism.

Pratt can be categorized under the group of Victorians like Arnold, Browning, Tennyson and Carlyle sharing his visions with modernists like T.S Eliot and the pioneer of free verse Ezra Pound. Pratt never yearned to abandon any earlier poetic principles and stylistics. Instead he was very ambitious of evolving poetic designs of novelty that will certainly be emanating out of them .He possessed a refined temperament of accepting the world views irrespective of periods, nation and ethos. He never questioned the well formulated Darwin theory or theological ideologies of immortality. He has remarkably made a deeper probing into the existing associations between Christianity and evolutionary theory. His literary greatness lies in the refashioning of the outmoded perspectives into the ever dueling subjects of modern experience.

Apart from his shorter poems, Pratt has attained a greater success with the narrative poems. They are noted for their epic breadth. Through many intellectual theorists have shut up the doors of producing epics of grandeur, Pratt optimistically claims that there are many avenues for heroic actions as in the ancient world to prove manliness and fortitude.

Tradition and Transformation:

The Toll of the Bells is his poetic accomplishment that commemorates the death of Iliad upon the floes. It is an early poem that revolves around the life of the contemporary newfound land fisherman who glorifies the heroic death of Iliad. For Pratt, the grand themes and well celebrated subjects evolve not only out of Trojan war that inspired Virgil to contribute an enduring epic **Aeneid**, but also world war II can provide a creative ground for the promising subjects to the world of literature. Thus “Man”, the chief character,

the hero, a man of valorous action is the progressive soul concerned with evolution and up building for the greater enterprise of the world.

"His poetic narratives give mythological moulding to the Canadian tales, the building of the rail roads, The Jesuits'missionary, rescues at sea confrontation of man with nature the effects and the experience of war and so on."⁵

The poem 'The Titanic' (1935) is a pictorial representation of man's technological arrogance and reflection of the sense of impersonal violence of nature. The poet dwells upon the past event in an emotional idiom when such theme has lost its flavour with his contemporaries; Pratt poetizes the significant portion of such subject. He proves himself to be an active champion of his age. The technological failure naturally reflects upon man's indifference and carelessness. Despite his enlarged visions, widened boundaries of knowledge and broadened mental horizons, man fails due to his frailties and fallibilities. This poem elucidates a truth that man is subject to any kind of human test that blunts his intellect.

'The Titanic' contemplates upon the dignified self-martyrdom of the individual on one hand and the feasibility of the recurrence of disaster in man's life on the other.

"That ancient hubris in the dreams of men
which would have slain the cattle of the sun
and filched the lightings from the first of Zeus...." (The Titanic)

The reference to Trojan War is a fascinating poetic theme for Pratt and it sets him to claim that contemporary human actions are performed in perfect tune with the progressive features of the universe. Though the subject of modern science holds him in wonder, he remained politically and spiritually a visionary. His heart throbbed for producing something exalted as literature with epic high seriousness. As a typical maritime poet, he was preoccupied thematically with the shaping of the past and present experience drawn upon the events and happenings around the world, with reference to navigation.

"The presentation of man pitting himself against the harsh and relentless challenge of the natural world is so realistic..."⁶ Moral

struggle and persecution effected through physical confrontation and corporeal conflict is pictured metaphorically in the poem such is not an uncommon theme in the literary works. T.S. Eliot's **Cocktail Party** and Hemingway's **An Old Man And The Sea** communicate the uniformity of ideas in their respective ways.

"Self preservation fought in red primordial
struggle with the ought" (The Titanic)

The poem illustrates that the struggle in man's life exists from the beginning. It is fundamental in his life relating to his early phase of development. The fact implies that suffering is the essential condition of human wisdom. Suffering leads to spiritual awakening. So man must possess the required colossal strength to endure misery of any nature.

The poems written in Canadian essence and context are **Brebeuf and his Brethren** (1940) and **Towards The Last Spike** (1952), which need to be mentioned in this context. The poet desired to revive the epic tradition and the epic period of culture and thus he accomplished it by creating on a grand scale two epic stories, one dealing with the subject of physical endurance and the other pertaining to the secular world the technological content. As a precursor, he finds for his creative endeavour, the unique synthesis of the literary characteristics, patterns and trends from the world of classics and modernity.

The Tale of Brebeuf has been built upon the life of Jesuit missionaries martyred by Iroquois in 1649. Pratt has succeeded in his attempt at capturing the well-celebrated epic theme of physical courage, stoic endurance and the spiritual vision through his portrayal of the fellow priests. This long poem extols the sublimity of the inner being, self, soul, god sent breath, and the centre of emotions.

'Brebeuf And His Brethren' introduces a pair of protagonists whose images elucidate indispensable feeling that "all men are brothers." Brebeuf's Brethren are the Indians as well as his fellow Jesuits. Pratt here with the ever-cherished visions magnifies the characters and dispositions of both pagans and believers of Christianity. The god like nature and steadfast devotion in Brebeuf

captivated Pratt. The poem is constructed upon the basis of epic principles. The story narrated here is outstanding for one major cause that it imparts profound insight into the complex nature of man. It is an epic tragedy in which the story of suffering leading to the death of the hero is related. This is the poem that amply proves the epic form is indispensable in the twentieth century literary world. Thus Pratt's ability to work in the epic mode is proved skillfully.

‘The Truant’ is a beautiful piece of composition that presents the inevitable need for evolving the moral consciousness in mankind. The irresistible attitude of man against cosmic tyranny and man's yearning for breathing his native air of freedom form the central thesis of the poem. The lack of effort at the face of challenges and promises cripple mankind the pressures and forces to a threatening degree. Man is the victim of the cosmic despotism.

“No by the road,
we Will not join your ballet ...” (The Truant)

‘The Truant’ embodies the idea of abandoning the tyrant god of mechanistic universe with mechanized existence and materialistic fervour.

‘Towards The Last Spike’ has been produced in conformity to the cosmic features. This poem is the best illustration of Pratt's poetic sensibility for the unification of tradition and modernity. Pratt acclaims the subject of this poem to be the unique Canadian epic subject as it borders on two nations but also ponders over the technological advancement and the communication, which mark distinctive features of modernity. The story evolves out of the recurring theme of man versus nature. As usual Pratt insists upon the heroic stature of man attune with the physical struggle recommending stoic notions.

The poem that establishes a close-knit kinship between man and machine is ‘The Man and Machine’. It is a realistic depiction of the delightful state of man in a new machine ever working together with the constructive direction.

Conclusion:

“Pratt an apostle of corporate man registers the emotions of his community.”⁷ Being a leading poet of Canada, he brings a menial cure upon the ailing humanity. Endowed with Victorian optimism, he recognizes in man, valour, strength and fortitude that can vanquish the insurmountable vile and wild forces impeding his path of action. He firmly upholds a view that man is born to try his might upon the courageous enterprises for assuming the stature of splendor. Therefore he proves his heroism and bravery overcoming his struggle and physical affliction that obstruct his progress towards perfection and attainments. Though sometimes his efforts and attempts result in total bust, the strenuous path prescribed to him during his life span aids him instill the zeal for effective, fruits bearing life living a quiet day.

Evolution and vision are the two poles of human life recommended and prescribed willfully by Pratt in his poems. The ideal goal of literary studies is the ideal way of combining the features of intellectuality and vitality with the unique fusion of spirituality. So Pratt dreams of witnessing evolution, progress and advancement in every sphere and period of human history. The scope of his works rests upon drawing heat and light from the resources of past, the treasures of immortal thoughts with staunch faith in the reconciliation of past and present. The past instructs man, promoting interest in the outside world advocating clear perception with the zeal for human resource management. The long varied experiences recorded in classics enable man acquire the analytic and experimental frame of mind to cultivate the basis of ideal character. All these can be wrought by the fit studies of the past. The present has its culmination in the past with the novel opening for the future. But it is so distressing to note that the modern man of arid intellect interrogates with the greater amount of suspicion the intrinsic value of literature. He makes a heavy throw of mud on the literary world debunking with sneering contempt that literary features practice man for the mere lingering in the region of fantasy but not to grant him with the foresight getting along with the on going march of the events and the post modernistic expansion of the world. The degenerated modern humans must have the right sensibility to

discern that literature inspires one in proportion to the depth of his insight. No wonder why literary studies function as an indispensable portion of a nation's civilization and culture. They are not a mere museums of verbal expression from the past but the genuine expressions of the altitudes, hopes and aspirations of man on which lies the root of evolutionary principles. Thus the works of Pratt present a full spectrum of up building of man for the great enterprise of the world.

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4

A Seismograph of Senility in the Poems of Raymond Souster

—*Mrs. K. Ponni*

Canada, a country of complex physical environment with its concomitant consequences frames a society, where men and matters are succumbed to the abundance of nature. They have to reconcile with the surroundings to find a compensation for the unavoidable exposures of the absolute nature. Canadian literature with all its forms and techniques reflect the affectations and the affected in its own panoramic style to insist on human endeavours. It has emulated to empanel itself into the core of world literature with a designation as Canadian literature. It is an expression of humanity and entrails the entire world. The basis of human nature pierces its roots into the inner most recesses of the minds of the people and seek a universal appeal through its literature.

Raymond Souster who represents the second generation of modern Canadian poets, presents senility in a casual voice but with a deliberate tone of indictment. "Souster's poems tend to be short, colloquial in diction, frequently epigramitic, aiming at the sharp and ironic insight into a specific situation that expands in the mind to an insight into existence itself" (**Twentieth Century Poetry**, p. 443). This paper analyses three of his poems titled 'Man Dying' 'Old Man Leaning on a Fence' and 'Down Town Corner News Stand' under a common umbrella of 'Senility' – the last few dots in the continuum

of human life started with the birth of an individual. These flashes of insights into the existence of reality reveal the modern man's attitude to the senior citizens. Seismograph records the shocks of the earth with its intensity. Souster reverberates the trepidations of human mind in these poems. Eventhough the surface seems to be unaffected, the tremors are felt through the seismograph of the subtext of the lines.

Raymond Souster in his poem 'Man Dying' picturises a senile man who is considered to be nothing by the society around him. As human eyes are the powerful communicators of the state of the individual's physique and psyche, the poet reads a premonition in the old man's eyes. The presentiment states, "This is my last summer." There is no specific scheme of actions in his daily routine, except sitting 'daylong through the hours' with a cap on his head. His eyes look so straight, that the sight is fixed which shows deep thinking, remorse or aimlessness. They do not bother to move for any menace around him. The chords of the far-fixed eyes are too strong to be disturbed by the man-made world, which wavers along the current of the ways of the world. But nature as it withstands and withholds, is all powerful. Even a small bird, which is a representative of that great nature has the power to dismantle the mental crust and the 'Dying man' turns his eyes 'to follow with a bird' and 'its sudden darting arrow across the gross.' Though the bird is tiny and the grass is insignificant, they emanate the feeling even from those old eyes which are determined to be straight and not to be disturbed by the vanities of the world.

Even the technically developed medical science provides no knowledge to its practitioners to save him now. Technocrats prattle in all the human languages only to outshine another man or technique. The most advanced science dangles like a hovering flame of a candle under the sunlight of Omnipotent nature. The course of nature can never be altered. Senility caused by loss of cells which cause the loss of senses has no medicine to be injected. As Shakespeare's Jacques would say in **As you like it**.

Last scene of all

That ends this strange eventful history,

.....
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

The old man of Souster feels that the power of his muscles diminishes and he struggles even to light his pipe. Even though his limbs fail, his strong will, does not allow his eyes to show any fear. When the 'Dying man' looks at the poet "there is no fear in those eyes." This resignation of the old age is a deduced fruit of the age long experience. The poet feels that "death's look is there already." Both the internal and external systems of his body have lost their stamina and it is shown in the eyes, which are the indicators of one's health.

A jet plane rushes fast over the household with thunderous roar and the surrounding air tingles with its noise. A jet plane that produces a sound more than 110 decibels is scientifically hazardous to human ear. But this old man is not at all disturbed in the least, since his ears had tolerated even more thunderous noises in his life. So "He sits in his chair and it is nothing to him, all of its nothing." As a wan senile man, he has nothing to do with any human beings, since he is beyond the narrow regions of human life. From this transient life he moves towards a life that is meant 'for ever'. There is no more compatibility with the world and its men for him.

Human life with all its vigour, endeavours toward strange enterprises and challenges the world. The modern man aspires more and achieves to his capability. The modern man creates or destroys and lives in accordance with his relative emotions. An energetic man is also egoistic and caters to the whims and fancies of his self. Senility destructs one's self and a man sans his self is like a robot. In the next phase with the fading and feeble last streak of energy he tries to make the last movements, like moving the eyeballs towards a bird and sitting on a chair. His disability to be of any use to any one makes the society feel, "He's done with us now." The real worth of the old people with all their lives' experiences is not realized. The practical man believes only in utilitarianism and swirls along materialism, for whom, the 'Man dying' is 'nothing'.

In a society where the human workmanship was the order of the day, the elderly people were considered precious and their movements, words and deeds were closely followed to learn the art. But in the mechanical world, there are automatic iron and plastic actors and movers, which are internally systematized. Even if they

are struck, the computers solve the problems. The human experiences of the elders, which are unique in their own, have lost their valuable utility of guidance in this current scenario.

Raymond Souster in his short poem 'Old man Leaning on a Fence' brings out the feeling of present hatred in the society. Energetic

Men "hate to be that fence
under the old man"

since, he does not like to bear the weight. The old man in his able days would have been a fence to the young with a sense of duty and pleasure. On the contrary, when he has become 'withered, shrivelled up and ready for death' none has bothered to take care of him. Because they feel that the burden of the old man with

"..... the weight of all
the wasted bitter years
multiplied, grown immense
bending the shoulders over"

An old man's worldly expectation to be guarded by the young is outmoded. His life was bitter; the multiplied bitterness has grown immense; the immensity would bend the people's shoulders who may be ready to bear the weight of the "Old Man Leaning on a Fence"

Rabindranath Tagore in his
"Wings of Death" feels
Under the dome of the universe
The wheel of suffering revolves (On the sick-bed, p. 42)

The revolving wheel of suffering spares no age and no man. Every individual has his own burden like John Bunyan's Christian. Even if anyone is ready to bear other's load, then it would be too heavier to hold.

"no fence should be expected
to hold up under that load"

The men of present generation are quite unwilling to shoulder the old even though they were brought up and shouldered by those old.

The society has to be the trestle for the 'Man Dying' and 'Old Man Leaning On the Fence'. But the old are left

without any support and resulted in the emergence of Old Age Homes throughout the world. In the present century of cloning where even the sacred ties of parent-child relationship have become superficial, the seismograph of Souster is true but has to be altered for better.

In another poem titled, 'Downtown Corner News Stand' he portrays an old man who has determined to work till his death.

The poet feels that nothing can drive him away from that particular corner of the town except death, because the old man considers that corner as his world. He is its unshaved bleary-eyed, foot stamping king ...

His prolonged standing makes him stamp his feet atleast to revive his passive cells. As any human being he curses the cold in the winter and huddles himself in his coat to guard him against the cold wind. During summer he is exposed to the scorching sun and ".... fry in summer like an egg, hopping on a griddle."

In the great cycle of nature the Earth revolves; the seasons change accordingly in due course down the ages. An old man has experienced these changes in every year of his life but still he is seen around with

".... the whining voice, the nervous – flinging arms
the red face, shifting eyes watching, waiting
under the grimy cap ..."

The old man waits, watches and yet unable to understand the movement of the next moment since God only knows the secrets of the seconds and it is beyond human conception. In the case of this waiting old man no 'godot' of Becket has appeared and the next morning has dawned 'a little dirtier.' He is entitled to get degenerated by the ways of the world.

The old man stands there with armful of daily newspapers and has kept the cap down against the piercing rays of the sun. He does not want to be disturbed and wants to protect himself from the turbulences of nature. The poet exclaims at him saying,

.... all the city's restless seething river
surge beside you, but not once do you plunge
into its flood, are carried or tossed away."

He has never ventured into the water, which runs by his side and so never allowed himself to be 'tossed away'. He stands in the

corner and only death can move him away. He sells newspapers with sensational news items but he is not at all bothered about the occurrences around him. He does not enjoy or even notice the all-pervading nature around him.

"but reappear always, beard longer than
ever, nose running"

The longer beard or the running nose, makes no impression in him and he runs fast 'to catch the noon editions at King and Bay.' It is a mechanical survival of the modern old man knowing what would befall him if he expects the world to take care of him. Tagore, the Nobel Laureate says,

"I know only that millions are moving on
stopping, as they go, to sell their goods,
He too who stays to receive,
Vanishes also in a little while"

None can stay in the world ever to enjoy, the senility is inevitable to every one born. But without realizing that, man moves fast without carrying the present senile. In the view of Tagore, these able bodied young would also vanish in a little while. He feels 'I am only a guest in this world' (42).

As a man is a guest in this world, he cannot claim any right over anything and his life is also highly uncertain. In the words of Tagore, senility is

The suffering of existence
In the net of destruction (Wings of Death, 43.)

The three old men of Souster, one who is working round the clock, of 'Downtown corner News Stand', the next who had worked and exhausted and who wishes to take rest of "old man leaning on a fence," another old man who lives in a world beyond human reach and waits to die of "Man dying" provide him the data to draw his seismograph. They live in the 'suffering of existence' and since they are old and the net of destruction is closely knit, the end is inevitable. Even though it is the law of nature that the earthly born has to grow and reach their senility, the present age old people undergo this torture without any caretaking human companions.

The seismograph indicates the upheavals of the old mind along with a comparative line of the unaffected rigidity of the

contemporary youngsters. In the view of Sigmund Freud "..... each new generation is corrupted by being born into an irrational society. The influence of man on society and of society on man is a vicious circle (**A Premier of Freudian Psychology**, 14). without being aware of the vicious circle of the seemingly virtuous world, man moves in line with his acquired attitudes suiting his convenience. Since the basic human values have lost their significance in the present age, the condition would still more be deteriorative in the future when the present generation of abled would become disabled. The rejection of the senile is in a personal level at present. An individual is the micro unit of the macrocosm of society, and so this kind of rejection is likely to spread so casually in the society around. There is an impending danger for the whole of human race, that its senility to be neglected by its society. It may be fancied that a fleet of robots would be systematized to attend on the senile till they cross the sea of life.

The forecast of the seismograph of senility has to be perceived in the right perspective. Or else another poet in another stream of poems would record the future devastation.

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5

Feminist Streaks in Canadian Short Stories

—Dr. J. Samuel Kirubahar

Canada's contemporary masters of the short story : Mavis Gallant, Alice Munro, and Margaret Atwood, are all women writers which is a fact and a literary enigma for anyone interested in studying this exceptionally strong genre of Canadian literature. The dominance of women writers shows the "recent tendency to turn inward, towards the body, the emotions, and ultimately the mind - territories that have not received sustained or primary attention by male writers in Canada."

The suffrage movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Canada gave rise to extant literary ambitions of women to have female literary tradition. The movement aimed at liberating women from the restrictions and inhibitions of the restricted socio-cultural norms of the nation and intended to provide economic independence. It began to assert confidently the authority of the feminine sensibility and to have a strong feminine sensibility. And as a result, gender politics constituted a major thrust and an overriding preoccupation in Canadian short stories. the writers in these short stories questioned sex and gender roles and protested against patriarchal structure of power and dominance that subsume and expropriate the woman's identity. Particularly women writers of short fiction in Canada had to postulate a contextual discourse on feminine identity and search that explores and exposes and resists the hegemonic and homogenizing patriarchal power structures.

Defining feminism is not that easy as that of anything as it includes broader perspective. However, it means, to the feminist, a sense of personal courage and a kind of social revolt against convention like living outside marriage as marriage is an impossible situation institutionally for two people to live together - help achieve cultural androgyny. Feminism advocates non-motherhood, free love, easy divorce, economic independence for all women, and other demoralising and destructive agents. In fact, feminine situation determines the character and action of its victims realising personality and achieving self - determination through life, growth, and experience. It intends to transform the ideas of submission and femininity. It is a female expression which is naked and fiery in form as male impersonation. Marry Ellman would call it "Phallic Criticism"; Cynthia Ozick, "the Ovarian Theory of Literature" and Kimberley Snow, "the Biological Put Down".

Feminism is a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome - women free themselves from it. Women in feminist writings are presented as characters on three levels; viz.,

1. Character is derivative in which the writer uses it as a common model.
2. Character is a product of social conditioning to mirrorise the ideal or counter - ideal of the prevailing values of the society.
3. Character is a symbolic fulfillment of the writer's needs.

The attributes of the women characters in feminist writings are formlessness, passivity, instability (hysteria), confinement (narrowness), practicality, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy, and incorrigibility. In fact, in all these feminist writings the male becomes a metaphor for all the de-humanising and despotic attitudinal and behavioural patterns. Hence, male versus female dichotomy becomes a metaphor rather than a literal distinction. In Marian Engel's 'Anita's Dance' Anita had no reason to feel sorry for herself when she compared her life to others. She had a house, a garden, a car, a piano and above all a good job. She really wanted to get married when she was at University but the boy she was very fond of had wanted to drop her scholarship. Her fondness had ceased abruptly when he argued that being male

he had more right to an education than she had. On the other side, Anita never wanted her mother's life as her mother was always anemic from child bearing and exhausted from scrubbing. In fact, "Anita shuddered that dream of domesticity was a male dream" (p. 256). On her inner recess she wanted to meet Clive but her brother Jack came to her house and made her furious as he used her private belongings. Jack was big and stupid and had not succeeded in life. Clive came to the rescue and he wiped away the aggressive domination of Jack on her by sending him away from her house. The short story writer presented Anita as a formless, passive, unstable creature confined to her life alone.

In Margaret Atwood's "The Sin Eater" Joseph becomes a metaphor to dehumanise the narrator of the story. Joseph used to say to the narrator of the story that in Wales there was a personage known as the Sin Eater. When someone was dying they would have the coffin ready and the meal would be placed on the dead person's body. Sin Eater would devour this meal and thus become absolutely bloated with other people's sin. Margaret Atwood writes, "She'd accumulate such a heavy load of them that nobody wanted to have anything to do with her; a kind of syphilitic of the soul, you might say" (p.315). The Sin Eaters are old women and "there's no reason why they shouldn't have been men, They could be anything as long as they were willing to eat the sins. Destitute old creatures who had no other way of keeping body and soul together,.... A sort of geriatric spiritual whoring" (p.315). The sins are transmitted in the food. In the climax, when Joseph passed away, the narrator of the story had to become a Sin Eater. Thus "Sin Eater" represents the conflicting relation with the past ritual to account for the enigma of her identity in the present.

Helen's "Causation" also presents the story with the images of hiatus, severance and discontinuity to reinforce the idea of fractured and fragmented reality of the life of a woman, fifty five, married to Oswald. She is leading a double life, a life of lies and fabrications and fictions that enables her to gloss over the harsh realities of her lived - life. In "Causation" Gyorgi introduces himself as a 'Piano Tuner' and falls in love with the wife of Oswald. Oswald is a rich man but all the time he would be touring and counting dollars. He

has never paid attention to the likeness of his wife and as a result she falls in love with Gyorgi, a Piano tuner. Gyorgi is not a rich man but he dreams of owning her house after her death. He retraces his steps in imagination about the house in which she lives. Helen writes:

he sees her laid out in a satin - lined coffin, in a same flowered housecoat and instead of her sluttish make -up, the face in death is delicately tinted as if in the blush of youth. The mortician's skill has fixed the happiness he, Gyorgi, gave her. After the funeral he stays on in the old house, (p.104).

When the woman narrates the story related to her life with Oswald, Gyorgi used to listen to her story. Helen vividly presents the situation.

He had no idea what she was talking about, but he realised that she was determined to reveal herself to him. It was as if woman had to expose themselves—their defeats, their triumph, their hopes and beliefs—before they undressed. In his opinion, a nude man in a raincoat was more honest (p. 106).

Oswald was the former husband of that lady and he loved her and offered the world she wanted to have. She sang for him, dressed for him. One day, he told her that she had deceived him as he didn't care about material things and had no interest in them. He wanted to touch the infinite, discover the ineffable and he was on a journey of the spirit as he was concerned with immortal soul. He neglected her.

Helen presents the woman as a representative of the Canadian psyche - feminine, passive, lacking identity and suffering a victim complex. For her, marriage is the most diabolic law of all laws. As a home - bound woman she experiences time as a stasis - either as perpetual repetition or eternal return or as a pattern of passive waiting. When Gyorgi moves from place to place she identifies that he is moving with an animal grace.

Helen as a feminist intends and attempts to mobilise woman acts dynamically in her social environment generating and responding to hostility and resistance as well as enthusiasm. In fact, the story aims to alter power relationships between her and Oswald as she meets resistance not only from male self - interest, and the interest of the entrenched holders of power, but also from human

leanings toward commitment, acculturation, or resignation to the established forms in which gender relations are enmeshed. One day she frightens Gyorgi by telling that life is an imposition and in it Oswald has imposed himself on her life. He imposes works on her. When he wants to marry her, she opens the secret that if she marries him she has to leave the house as the house is Oswald's. On hearing this Gyorgi feels evicted, dislodged from a place in his head. Helen writes: "Gyorgi kept going, backwards, stepping over the thick carpets for the last time ... she will take the money to keep her safe for yet another little while" (p.114).

Feminism aims toward goals of equality between the sexes. It also aims at having equality in education, of a single sexual standard, and equal suffrage. The story by Isabel Valancy Crawford "Extradited" presents the story of Samuel O'Dwyver and Bessie, husband and wife. Bessie wants to have a hired man to assist her in her works as she doesn't want Sam's, man, Joe to take care of her child. Silently contemptuous of her unlettered husband, she is nevertheless jealous of his friendship with Joe, hiding out from the law, whom she secretly betrays - for a reward that fate denies her. Bess decides to have a single sexual standard and equal suffrage against her husband's relations with Joe.

Feminism abandons the stance of moral superiority, which has been tied to sexual purity, and evoked instead women's sexuality. Feminists are frank about sex. They are free lovers. They assign more liberatory meaning and value to passionate heterosexual attachment. Seeing sexual desire as healthy and joyful, they assume that free women could meet men as equals on the terrain of sexual desire. Reading Susie Frances Harrison's short story "The Idyll of the Island" would give an impression of the feminist writing which talks about the chance encounter of an English visitor to Canada, Admiral Amherst, and a young Canadian woman. It opens with a detailed description of an exquisitely lonely island which seems just the size for two on a certain July morning. Admiral Amherst falls in love with a lady whom he sees in the jungle. Harrison writes: "Amherst was fast falling in loving ... she seemed to him to be twenty six or seven, and so frank, simple, and graceful, one could not have resisted liking her" (p.15). Michelle Gadpaille in **The**

Canadian Short Story observes that : “this is the prelude to a chaste but emotional hour - long meeting, leading to kisses, and a willed separation that precedes the appearance of the woman’s husband, stout and pleasant and mild of countenance, returning in a row-boat from fishing” (p.12).

Canadian feminists explore the power politics in interpersonal relationships and relate the women’s crisis not only to the patriarchal structures of power and dominion but also to the woman’s own passivity and complicity in the power structures that subject and subjugate them. Sex outside marriage involved transvaluation of values, erasing the boundaries between the pure and the fallen women. It is a personal form of direct action which is risky and thrilling. Women’s true fulfillment is sex specific, intrinsically bound to the nurturance expressed in maternity. In fact, women break the separation between motherhood and female eroticism and link motherliness to heterosexual desires. They argue that women should be free to form love relationships and should be able to end marriages which did not bring them sexual satisfaction. Crawford in “Extradited” writes erotically, “She had her arms round his neck. She curved serpent wise in his clasp to get her eyes on his eye” (p.1). Similarly Helen in “Causation” writes,

I adore you, you are low born, you have no character, you are inevitable. Ours will be an affair of terrible limits. Your insults are without principle. Whatever grief you will cause will come naturally and I shall recover as one does after slipping on ice” (p.107).

The love outside marriage in “Causation” has made the “Piano Turner” turned to be an elegant man with a new address card in which “Pianos Tuned to Perfection” embossed in shiny black script. Gyorgi “the Piano Tuner” used to question her often related to her sexual behaviour. Helen writes:

what had taken place with her and Oswald in bed; what had she done with other men; how many lovers; in what combinations. And she, without a second thought, would lay open intimacies as one spreads open an umbrella in the rain. and always she hugged her knees and chortled deep in her throat, ‘But you, my darling, are the best, you are the champ (p.109).

Every night, Gyorgi made love to her - prolonged love-making. He treated the whole business as his part of the bargain. In bed, his movements were as easy and graceful as he painted a wall or repaired a broken drainpipe. He was precise and unhurried.

Equally Bharati Mukherjee in "The Lady from Lucknow" vividly presents the story of free sex and lust. When the narrator was four, one of the girls to her next door fell in love with a Hindu. Her father beat her with his leather sandals. She died soon after. Her name was Husseina. The narrator also fancied herself in love many times but never enough for emotions to break. At seventeen she married a good man, Iqbal. Iqbal was of a type who happened to be always cautious of her beauty. Even he advised her that she could distract the golfers as Americans are crazy for sex. She had a lover, James Beamish, an older man, an immunologist with the centre for Disease control right there in town. She met him at a party. James made her flatter indefatigably feel beautiful, exotic, and responsive. She felt herself a creature immunised of contamination. They used to have sex at their houses. She had an idea that, "Wives who want to be found out will be found out. indiscretions are deliberate. The woman caught in mid-shame is a woman who wants to get out" (p.350). Equally, when she had sex with James at his house, she was accidentally caught by his wife and adultery in the house was probably no different than in other houses. She had not felt it as a guilt. She played at being helpless, hysterical, and cruel. When his wife came back, she realised: "Love on the decline is hard to fell from love on the rise" (p.354). When she was in bed with James, she realised that she was a shadow without depth and a shadow temptress. The reason for having sex outside marriage was realised by her. She and Iqbal used to be sensual but the openness of James Beamish surprised her. When the affair came to an end she thought that it was humorous and silly as she had known all along that perfect love had to be fatal. So she let him call her a lab as she had it because of her distracted husband which was painful.

Jane Rule's "Slogans" is a world of Lesbians. Jessica and Nancy have lesbian attitude as James writes : "Jessica and Nancy hadn't much confided in each other, but they came to depend on each other in a casual way, more like sisters than like friends but

without sisterly intolerance" (p.219). During college days Nancy used to wear a "whorish underwear" and being a Lesbian she doesn't want to marry a man. She has Ann on her side and she has taken an unfair advantage of Jessica. In the months before graduation Jessica and Nancy are very careful to avoid being alone together. Jessica is a divorcee. James writes "Already divorced before her first bout, the children all away at school or college, Jessica bought a wig, took a lover, and in the first remission went with him to Europe" (p.218). The whole world of "Slogans" is a world of Lesbians. Jessica's and Nancy's friends are lesbians. Verce is a divorcee and Larsen is a lesbian and admirably scandalous.

Gloria Sawai's "The Day I sat with Jesus on the Sundeck and a wind came up and Blew My kimono open and he saw My Breasts" presents the exhibitionistic voyeurism of its protagonist, Gloria Sawai was in her sixteen. Her father had sent her to a high school and she had to find lodging in a dormitory as her father was a religious man and wanted her to get a spiritual kind of education and to hear the WORD and know the LORD. A thousand questions came into her mind about the coming of Christ. When she was in grade school she had faced those terrible questions: "Do you love the Lord? Are you saved by grace above through faith? Are you awaiting eagerly the glorious day of his second coming? And will you be ready on that Great Day?" (p.245). True to her expectations Jesus of Nazareth, in person, climbed the hill in her backyard to her house on Monday morning, 11 September, 1972, in Mosse Jaw, Saskatchewan. She realised that she was not at all ready to receive him. At the same time, Gloira wanted to know how she was going to call Jesus. She wondered how to address Him. She remembered how the woman at the well, the one living in adultery, had called him. When Gloria sat with Jesus on the Sundeck a gust of wind hit her straight on and her robe was fully open. Jesus was looking at her breasts as the wind opened her bodice. She raised the Question: "What should I do"? Say excuse me and push them back into the Kimono? Make a little joke of it?" (p.249). The exhibitionistic attitude in her made her think about Mollie's art of revealing body exposure but never over the breasts. So, she realised that her appearance was not actually pleasing, either aesthetically or exotically - from Millie's point of view. Later, she began to have

visions related to breasts. In her vision, a magpie nibbled at Jesus's brown nipples and disappeared into his breast. Similarly, a rock landed on the breast of Jesus and melted into his skin. She had also seen a woman with the small brown curves of her breasts. Then suddenly she broke and a thousand questions entered into her mind.

what on earth had got on into me? Why had I spent this perfectly good morning talking about breasts? My one chance in a life time and I'd let it go. Why didn't I have better control? Why was I always letting things get out of hand? Breasts. And why was my name Gloria? Such a name for one who can't think of anything else to talk about but breasts. Why wasn't it Lucille? or Millie? (p.253).

When Jesus had to leave, he leaned over and kissed her on her mouth and flicked her nipple with his finger. Gloria Sawai's short story presents the act of showing breasts which dehumanises and inferiorises her and reduces her to be virtually dispensable commodity. In it, the deep distorting vision of breasts devastates the whole effect into the chilling and monstrous dystrophic vision. Gloria fantasises to evade the reality of the lived present with her vision related to breasts as she is obsessed with her fantasy - world to know Lord. The story also moves away from passive acceptance to active participation as Jesus kissed her and flicked her nipple before leaving with no cataclysm or violent climax. Gloria lives in scriptures and song of Christ and her romantic identification with the breast leads her to expect a romantic rescue by Christ himself in whom she is trapped and lost. In fact, shunning the real she wants to escape into the world of delirium. She becomes an escape artist and decides to stay on. The persistent duplicity - multiplicity in Gloria is so internalised in her imagination / vision about breasts that divides the true from false. Gloria's story may be said to be a psychological / spiritual odyssey towards self - discovery that finds its culmination in a ritualistic re-alignment with the primitive world and a subsequent re-alignment with the lived - world with altered perspective and a new vision. The vision is the result of alienation. As she is alienated by man, she finds a release through an unhysteric change in perspective consequenced by increased self- awareness and self- discovery of body - the savage beauty of breasts.

Joyce Marshal's short story "The Old Woman" presents a crisis related to the relationship between the wife, Molly, and her

husband, Toddy. Toddy wants his wife to be at home all the time and he loves his profession at the power house. Molly, being a lonely woman extends her help to the needy people. When she wants to help Joe Blanchard, she wants to get permission from her husband but accidentally finds that he has been taken by the machines. It is a machine and not a woman that has replaced her in Toddy's affections. Michelle Gadpaille writes,

"Too long isolated in this remote place, he has come to worship what he calls 'the old woman', the turbines and dials of the electric power generator. Conflict exists not only between Molly and Toddy, but within Molly herself, as she tries to avoid acceptance of her husband's mental condition" (p.35).

Marshal also writes, "For years I watch him fall in love with her. Now she has him for herself" (p.102).

In fact, these Canadian feminist short story writers present the self-destructive nature of passively and damaging effects of male chauvinistic structures. The women protagonists in their writings are in search for a distinctive feminine identity. They portray the woman's powerlessness and passivity. They are in the web of loveless marriage which is an anathema. They are inimical to marriage with an endless exacerbation of unfulfilled desire. It is axiomatic that all married couples are in love with each other. In these short stories, women are sapped, strangled, exploited, blinded by a decaying male civilization. And as a result, the kind of individualisation leads to clash of personalities and to breaking - up of the age - old institution of marriage because the modern woman does not find any sense of being acquiescent as it does not appeal to her imagination to be a suffering and sacrificing individual. The joy of the struggle is not joyous, hedonism, and hilarity, but the sense of purpose, achievement, and dignity which is the reflowering of etiolated energy.

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6

Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*: The Story of a Woman with a Will

—Dr. Basavaraj Naikar

Margaret Laurence is one of the very important women writers of Canada. She has written many novels like **The Fire-Dwellers**, **A Bird in the House**, **A Guest of God** and **The Stone Angel** and short stories like **The Tomorrow Tamer and Other Stories**. She is known for the typical feminine sensibility nourished on Canadian culture expressing itself in her delicate style. In all her novels, she has portrayed aspects of human life, which transcend the specificities of Canadian culture and attain the height of universality.

The Stone Angel which deals with the life of Hagar Shipley is a fine example of Margaret Laurence's understanding of human nature in general and feminine nature in particular. In it, she depicts the life of the protagonist, Hagar Shipley in its evolutionary aspect, but punctuated with tragedies, losses and separations.

The life of Hagar Shipley as delineated by Margaret Laurence may be divided into three phases: one, girlhood; two, youth and three, old age. But the technique employed by the novelist is an unusual one in that the life of the protagonist is not presented chronologically, but shown through an alternation between past and present, between memory and experience. The reader, therefore, has to be very alert in classifying the events of the past and the present

and rearranging them mentally for a coherent understanding of the protagonist's life and personality.

The novel begins with Hagar Shipley at the age of ninety remembering her entire past life in bits. The picture of the childhood as remembered by her may be built up as follows: Hagar's father had bought a large and blind stone angel and erected it in the Manawaka cemetery to mark the death of his feeble wife. It was the largest and costliest statue in Manawaka. As a child she did not understand why her father had brought it from Italy at terrible expenses.

"Summer and winter she viewed the town with sightless eyes, she was doubly blind, not only stone but unendowed with even a pretense of sight. Whoever carved her had left the eyeballs blank. It seemed strange to me that she should stand above the town, harking us all to heaven without knowing who we were at all. But I was too young to know her purpose..." (p.3).

As a child, Hagar used to walk in the cemetery and watch the flowers of different kinds. At that time Hagar, perhaps, had no consciousness or fear of death. She was the black haired daughter of Jason Currie who was a self-made man who used to compel her to study weights and measures. Hagar had two brothers namely Matt and Dan whom Jason used to whip with birches for not studying well. Once he beat Hagar also with a foot-ruler when she spoke the truth about insects in the barrel when Mrs. McVitie wanted to buy brown eggs. Right from her childhood, Hagar was frank and straightforward. Her father knew that she took after him. She started going to school. Her father advised her to concentrate on her studies and work hard. Jason had donated substantial money to the Presbyterian Church. Aunt Dolly told Hagar once that Jason was a god-fearing man. But Hagar knew that her father never feared anybody including even God.

Hagar lost her mother when she was very young. After the death of his wife, Jason never married anyone. He did not want to marry his own housekeeper Aunt Dolly who had protruding rabbit-like teeth.

Hagar knew the difference between her two brothers, i.e. Matt and Daniel. Her father never allowed Matt to take a gun to the mountain, but insisted that he should serve in the store after school

hours. By contrast, Daniel had poor health and dodged school repeatedly.

Hagar's father used to arrange many parties and invite friends like Charlotte Tappan, Telford Simmons and Henry Pearl. They had a craze for Japanese lanterns. Hagar remembers that the Wachakwa River used to freeze in winter and they used to go to the river and cut and bring ice-cubes home.

In her childhood, Hagar went to south Wachakwa for two years and returned after learning embroidery, French, menu planning and dressing her hair. Her father had refused to send her to Wachakwa for teaching lest she should go to the dances and be pawed by the farm boys. Hagar obeyed her father and kept accounts in his store. Hagar, who has lost her mother quite early in life, remains an obedient daughter of her father. She never dares to disobey him on any count. But a change can be seen in her behaviour when she attains puberty. Her biological urges become quite powerful and she becomes more and more assertive in her behaviour. For example when she stays in Manawaka for three years, once she happens to meet Brampton Shipley by chance. When Aunti Doll takes her to a dance at the school, she dances with Brampton Shipley. She knows that she has been undergoing a change in her mental attitude, perhaps because of her biological growth. While she is dancing with Brampton, he presses his groin to her thigh. Although she pushes him away out of a sense of embarrassment, she again dances with him when invited by him. Lottie Dreisser dislikes Hagar's dancing with Brampton as he is dirty and has been seen with half-breed girls. But goaded by sexual attraction and independent will, Hagar decides to marry Brampton. Although her father does not allow her to marry him, she decides to marry him. She resists the patriarchal control by selecting a man of her choice for a husband thereby asserting her identity. Her knowledge of Brampton's marital history does not prevent her from marrying him. For example, Brampton Shipley is fourteen years older than her. He has returned from the East. His first wife Clara who has died of burst spleen was as inarticulate as a sabbled beast. Hagar does not pay heed to the warning by her father or others. Her wedding takes place in the local church, but neither her father nor her brother Matt attend it. Only Auntie Doll attends it.

Charlotte Tappen arranges a reception for Hagar's wedding. Hagar hopes that her father would soften after seeing Brampton's progress. The relationship between Hagar and her father is strained on account of Hagar's self-assertiveness and disobedience to the father and non-conformity to the familial opinion.

Her matrimonial life with Brampton Shipley forms the second phase of her life. When she goes to her husband's home i.e. the Shipley House, she is received warmly and presented with a cut-glass decanter with silver top by her husband. Hagar's first sexual experience is characterized by pain, embarrassment and wonder. She is surprised to learn that Brampton Shipley who is an experienced husband wants to devirginize her not at night, but during the daytime. Hagar is embarrassed by his eagerness for sex.

"Let's see what you look like under all that rig-out, Hagar." I looked at him not so much in fear as in an iron incomprehension. "Downstairs," he said, "Is that what bothers you? Or daylight? Don't fret – there's no one around for five miles." "It seems to me that Lottie Dreiser was right about you," I said, "although I certainly hate to say it." "What did they say of me?" Bram asked. They-knowing more than one had spoken. I only shrugged and would not say, for I had manners. "Never mind that now," he said, "I don't give a good goddamn. Hagar – you're my life" (p. 51).

Brampton Shipley forces her into sex. Having had no premarital sexual experience, Hagar undergoes the pain of being deflowered and at the same time wonders at her own capacity to contain his large manhood,

"It hurt and hurt, and afterward he stroked my forehead with his hand."

"Didn't you know that's what's done?"

I said not a word, because I had not known, and when he'd bent, enormous and giant. I would not believe there could be within me a room to house such magnitude. When I found there was, I felt as one might feel discovering a second head, an unsuspected area" (p. 52).

After having the first experience of sex, Hagar discovers the mystery of her own biological world. Concurrently she is transformed from a girl into a woman and wife. After assuming the new role of a wife, she also learns the new responsibility of keeping

the house. She scrubs the floor for the first time in her life. She tries to understand her husband and encourage him in his profession.

When she gets a child (Marvin) in course of time, she sends words to her father, Jason Curie, that she has no objection to his seeing his grandson. She wants to repair the strained relationship with her father. But Jason never cares to see his grandson.

Jason Currie dies of stroke rather unexpectedly, but he has written his will and donated his money to the town. His magnanimity is praised in the local newspaper *Manawaka Banner*. Within a year after his death a Jason Currie memorial park is started in the town. The father-daughter relationship is characterized by mutually uncompromising egoism. Neither the father nor the daughter yield to the other in the case of marital choice of a husband. Hence the relationship between the two is severed permanently.

Hagar has a great emotional attachment to her husband's home, especially some objects which act as reminders of the past or of the love that people bore for her. She is deeply attached to the pottery pitcher in her house, which one belonged to her paternal grandmother, to the cut glass decanter, which was presented to her by her husband, and to the armchair.

Hagar's matrimonial life with Brampton is marked by a sort of temperamental incompatibility and conflict of personalities. Being an expert in marital and extra-marital sex, Brampton Shipley has shocked her at the initial stage of marital life by forcing her into sex during the daytime. Brampton Shipley provides a sharp contrast to Hagar in that he is rough, uncouth and uncultured in his behaviour whereas she is delicate, cultured and sophisticated. But in spite of her dislike for his uncultured behaviour, she tries to compromise with the situation. At the same time, she admires his physical handsomeness and feels proud of his big build, beard and smartness. She thus has an ambivalent relationship with her husband. One day when Hagar and Brampton Shipley go out for marketing, they happen to meet Charlottle Tappan on the way. Brampton Shipley talks very rudely to Charlottle. But Hagar does not like his rude and uncultured behaviour. Similarly when they go to a shop, Brampton Shipley unashamedly fingers the female undergarments and speaks in a rude language.

"In Simlow's Ladies' wear, the oiled floor boards smelled of dust and linseed, and the racks of hung garments were odorous with the sizing used in inexpensive cloth... I'd done my utr iost to persuade Bram not to come with me, but he couldn't see what I was making such a fuss about. Mrs. McVitie was there, and we bowed and nodded to one another. Bram fingered female undergarments, and I, mortified, looked away.

"Look, Hagar -- this here is half the price of that there one. If there's any difference, you couldn't hardly tell."

"Sh-sh -"

"What the hell's the matter with you? Judas priest, woman, why do you look like that?"

Mrs. McVitie had sailed out, galleon-like, having gained her gold. I turned on Bram.

"This here! That there! Don't you know anything?" "So that's what's eating you, eh?" he said. "Well listen here, Hagar, let's get one thing straight. I talk the way I talk, and I aren't likely to change now. If it's not good enough, that's too damn bad."

"You don't even try." I said.

"I don't care to," he said." I don't give a Christly curse how I talk, so get that through your head. It don't matter to me what your friends or your old men think" (p. 71).

A delicate and cultured lady as Hagar is, she feels ashamed of her husband's ruffian behaviour and consequently stops going out with him. Instead, she lets him go out alone on horseback and return home dead drunk. Hagar thus tries to tolerate the angularities and eccentricities of her husband in order to have a good marital life with him.

Hagar who is very keen on cleanliness does not like Brampton's dirty habit of blowing his nose.

"I remember a quarrel I had with Bram, once. Sometimes he used to blow his nose with his fingers, a not unskilled performance. He'd grasp the bridge between thumb and forefinger, lean over, snort hefty, and there it'd be, bubbling down the couch grass like snake spit, and he'd wipe his fingers on his overalls, just above the rump, the same spot always, as I saw when I did the week's wash. I spoke my disgust in no uncertain terms, not for the first time. It had gone on for years, but my words never altered him. He'd only say, 'Quit yapping. Hagar-what make me want to puke

is a nagging woman.' He couldn't string two words together without some crudity, that man. He knew it riled me. That's why he kept it up so" (p.79).

Such incidents, obviously, throw light on the opposite directions and natures of the couple. As days go by, the opposition between the two becomes intolerable to each other. "And yet - here's the joker in the pack-we'd each married for those qualities we later found we couldn't bear, he for my manners and speech, I for his flouting of them" (p.80). Brampton tells Hagar frankly that "There's men in Manawaka call their wives 'Mother' all the time. That's one thing I never done" (p. 80). He is neither delicate nor demonstrative in his love for his life. He always calls her by name 'Hagar' which she likes.

There is a world of difference between the two in their philosophy of love. Whereas Hagar believes in the poetry of love, Brampton Shipley is a believer in the drab prose of functional sex. Hence there is no alignment in their attitudes.

"His banner over me was love. Where that line comes from, I can't now rightly say, or else for some reason it hurts me to remember. He had a banner over me for many years. I never thought it love, though, after we wed. Love, I fancied, must consist of words and deeds delicate as lavender sachets, not like the things he did sprawled on the high white bedstead that rattled like a train" (p. 80).

Although Brampton Shipley is rough, crude and uncultured in his behaviour, there is some innocence about him. By contrast, although Hagar is delicate and cultured in her behaviour, she conceals her pride as well as her enjoyment of sex because of her Presbyterian background, which is, therefore, not perceived by her husband.

"It was not so very long after we wed, when first I felt my blood and vitals rise to meet his. He never knew. I never let him know. I never spoke aloud and I made certain that the trembling was all inner. He had an innocence about him, I guess, or he'd have known. How could he not have known? Didn't I betray myself in raising sap, like a heedless and compelled maple after a winter? But no. He never expected any such a thing and so he never perceived it. I prided myself upon keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhead" (p. 81).

The contrast between Brampton and Hagar would be seen in their attitude to fine arts. Whereas Hagar has a fine aesthetic sensibility, Brampton lacks it conspicuously, as he is a hard-boiled realist. That is the reason why he does not care to put any picture on the walls of his house. On the contrary, Hagar wants to beautify the walls by putting up a few pictures like Rosa Bonheur's *The Horse Fair*. Brampton Shipley does not appreciate Hagar's artistic attitude as he cares more for hard reality than for artistic reality. He, therefore, accuses her, "You never gave a damn for living horses, Hagar," he said at once. "But when you seen them put into paper where they couldn't drop manure, then it's dandy, eh? Well, keep your bloody paper horses. I'd as soon have nothing on my walls" (p. 93). Whereas Brampton is crazy about horses, Hagar never cares for horses because she is frightened by their muscularity and smelliness. Horses, obviously, symbolize high energy and sexual potency, which are indicative of Brampton's personality. When Hagar objects to his investment of all his money into buying and raising horses, and his negligence of the aesthetic upkeep of the house, he, bursts out, "All right, all right," he said furiously, "You can buy your goddamn carpets with the money there—does that suit you?" (p. 84) Hagar knows that her husband has no practical sense or head for business and therefore she worries about the livelihood. Their quarrel finally ends up in sex. "Wrangle, wrangle. It ended that night with Bram lying heavy and hard on top of me, and stroking my forehead with his hand while his manhood moved in me, and saying in the low voice he used only at such times, "Hagar, please." I wanted to say, "There, there, it's all right," but I did not say that" (p. 95).

Brampton persists in his love of horses by buying a grey stallion and a few mares. But he fails in the business of selling them, as he does not have the right capacity for bargaining. But Brampton's love for the horses is passionate and extra-ordinary. He has named his stallion as "soldier." One day the stallion and a mare go out for grazing. The mare returns after some time, but the stallion does not come home. Brampton is so much worried about the stallion that he lights the storm lamp and goes in the storm at night in search of it. Poor Hagar fears for Bram as well as for herself. The blizzard is terrible. After some time, Brampton returns deeply disappointed, without being able to get the stallion. Hagar tries to console him. "When we went to bed that night, he started to turn to

me, and felt so gently inclined that I think I might have opened to him openly. But he changed his mind. He patted me lightly on the shoulder" (pp. 87-88). Brampton finds the stallion in spring after the melting of snow. But the horse has been caught in a barbed wire fence and frozen to death by cold. Brampton buries it in the pasture.

Brampton believes in the patriarchal set up of society and therefore, desires a male progeny. When he takes Hagar to the hospital for delivery, he expresses his dynastic desire and hope for a male issue because he wants his dynasty to be continued.

"I sure hope it's a boy," he said.

"Why should you care if it's a boy?" I asked.

Bram looked at me as though he wondered how I could have need to ask.

"It would be somebody to leave the place to," he said.

I saw then with amazement that he wanted his dynasty no less than my father had." (pp. 100-101).

Brampton's dynastic desire and hope are fulfilled when he gets a son whom he names as Marvin. Hagar is not much bothered about the gender of the progeny. As Marvin grows into a boy of eight or nine, he develops a protesting kind of behaviour.

The clash of personality continues between Brampton and Hagar. Once when Hagar learns from Marvin that Brampton relieved himself near the steps of Currie's store, she shouts at him by calling him everything under the sun.

"Goddamn it, he complained defensively. "It was late at night. Hagar, and no one was about."

"The steps of my father's store – that was no accident. Who saw?"

"How in hell should I know who saw? I never did it for an audience. Shut up about it, Hagar, can't you? It's over and done with. I'm sorry. There, is that enough?"

"You think it fixes everything, to say you're sorry. Well, it doesn't."

"Judas priest, women, what do you want me to do? Get down on my bended knees?"

"I only want you to behave a little differently."

"Well, maybe I'd like you to be different, too."

"I don't disgrace myself."

"No, by Christ, you're respectable. I'll give you that." (pp. 115-116)

This incident adds up to the image of Brampton's uncultured behaviour and of Hagar's protest against it. Her entire matrimonial life is marked by such temperamental incompatibility and contrast. "Twenty-four years, in all, were scoured away like sandbanks under the spate of our wrangle and bicker" (p. 116).

Though mentally and emotionally they are opposed to each other, their only unifying force seems to be sex, which keeps the marriage going. "Yet when he turned his hairy belly and his black haired thighs towards me in the night, I would lie silent but waiting, and he would slither and swim like an eel in a pool of darkness." (p.116)

When Marvin is seventeen, he joins the Army for the First World War. But after his departure, Brampton neglects John who is only seven years old, and cannot help the parents in household work. Once Hagar and John go to sell eggs to families in the town but felt deeply embarrassed when they have to sell them to Lottie. Hagar is humiliated to be called an egg woman. Depressed by her poverty and goaded by a desire to enable John to lead a decent life, she decides to leave her husband to take up a job somewhere. Hagar who is a self willed woman couldn't pull on with her husband for long. She therefore, decides one day to leave him and seek a job somewhere as a housekeeper, and bring up John. She does not want to sneak away from her husband. On the contrary, she tells him her wish to go away. Brampton is so heartless that he neither prevents her from going nor worries about it.

"He didn't seem surprised. He never even asked me to stay or showed a sign of caring about the matter one way or another.

"When do you plan on going?" he said at last.

"Tomorrow morning."

"If I was you," Bram said, " I'd hard-boil a few eggs and take them along. I've heard the meals are high on the trains."

I wouldn't take eggs into a train," I said. "They'd think we were hicks."

"That would be an ever losing shame wouldn't it?" he said.

"That's all you've got to say?" I cried. "Food, for heaven's sake?"

Bram looked at me. "I got nothing to say, Hagar. It's you that's done the saying, "Well, if you' 're going, go" (pp. 141-142).

Far from being sentimental about Brampton's callousness, she takes John with her and goes in a train to the coast. She succeeds in getting a job as a housekeeper in Mr. Oatley's house. Mr. Oatley is a rich old man who is a great lover of classics and who wants his gigantic house to be kept spic and span. He stays alone in the big mansion and Hagar has to keep everything in order and serve him milk, tea and food at regular timings. Mr. Oatley's mansion has many valuable things in it like the Chinese carpets donated to him by a grateful Orientals whose wives he had smuggled in successfully.

Although Hagar has boldly left her husband and joined service as a housekeeper in Mr. Oatley's House, she sometimes misses Brampton's sexual company.

"I didn't care to dwell on the thought of his manhood. I suppose it reminded me of the things I'd sealed away in day time, the unacknowledged nights I'd lie sleepless even now until I'd finally accept the necessity of the sedative to blot away the image of Bram's heavy manhood. I never thought of Bram in the days any more, but I'd waken, sometimes, out of a half sleep and turn to him and find he wasn't beside me and then I'd be filled with such a bitter emptiness it seemed the whole of night must be within me and not around or outside at all. There were times when I'd have returned to him just for that. But in the morning I'd be myself once more, put on my black uniform with its white lace collar, go down and serve Mr. Oatley's breakfast with calm deliberation..." (pp.159-160).

Anyway, Hagar gets used to living with her son, John in Oatley's mansion.

After a few years, Hagar feels that she shouldn't have come to this outlandish place. Days and months roll by. Once John feels bored with Mr. Oatley's house and wants to go back to his father's place. Hagar opines that Bram must be dead by now. But she is surprised to know from John that John and Marvin have been writing to their father and receiving replies from him and that Brampton has been living with a half-breed girl who cooks his food.

Hagar has no money to give to John for his fare. But somehow John manages to go away to Shipley place. Hagar is forced by the contingencies of her life to live away from her husband and sons. Her marriage has failed in a way. That is the reason why she thinks. 'I'd be the last one to maintain that marriages are made in heaven...' (p.167).

After a lapse of two years, John writes to his mother that his father is very sick and may not live long. Hagar instinctively goes to Manawaka and is sorry to observe that Brampton has grown very emaciated, and hat he sits in an armchair fully covered in a sweater. He neither recognizes her nor speaks with her. John has been looking after Brampton in all ways-cleaning, washing and medicating etc. Once Marvin comes to Manawaka and sees his father and apologizes, "Sorry, dad."

Although Hagar has been staying in Shipley place and observes Brampton's sinking health, she does not feel any sympathy for and pride about her husband. On the contrary, she feels disgusted with him.

"Bram referred to me as 'that woman' like hired help, when he spoke of me to John. In the night once only, I heard him call -"Hagar!" I went to his room, but he was only talking in his sleep. He lay curled up and fragile in the big bed where we'd coupled and it made me sick to think I'd lain with him, for now he looked like an ancient child" (pp. 182-183).

Obviously, Hagar has no real matrimonial attachment for her husband.

One morning Hagar finds Brampton dead. Marvin cannot come to his father's funeral, but sends some money to meet the expenses. He has got a new baby called Christina. Hagar sees that Brampton is buried in the Currie plot beside the white statue. After returning home from the funeral John cries, but Hagar does not cry over her dead husband, because of the desiccation of her emotions towards him. For from being sentimental, Hagar Shipley has the courage to live alone and away from her uncultured and misunderstanding husband and face the problem of survival single-handed. One may easily see strands of feminist philosophy of emancipation within the limited framework of the institution of marriage and family. What is admirable in her is that unlike a

modern feminist she never goes in search of another man for sexual or emotional company.

Her attachment to her second son, John may be seen in her struggle to see him settled in life. It is only when Brampton Shipley neglected the seven year old John after the departure of Marvin for joining the army, that Hagar takes a decision to leave her indifferent husband and goes in search of a job as a housekeeper in Mr. Oatley's mansion. Before that, she is compelled by the dire situation to sell the family things like opal earrings; silver candelabra and dinner set for twelve. "You hear of people selling family things and being mortified, as though it meant disgrace. I didn't look at it that way at all" (p. 136). Hagar seems to be very practical in her life to face and solve the problems of survival.

In spite of the bond of affection between Hagar and her son, John, there is a conspicuous difference between their temperaments. A lady with some aesthetic sensibility, Hagar has bought a gramophone with a great black cornucopia on top and a handle. She wants to listen to Ave Maria and Beethoven's Fifth etc during the daytime. But "John did not take to music very much" (p.127).

Hagar does not like John's quarrelsome behaviour, use of severe words and association with uncultured boys.

"He was wild as mustard seed in some ways, that child. He'd come out with severe words that would curl your hair, and I knew where he'd got them. After he started school, the teacher sometimes sent me a note saying he'd been caught fighting again, and I'd scold him all right but I don't know that it ever did much good" (p.127).

Hagar worries more about John's friendship with uncultured and indecent boys.

"Once when I was picking out saskatoons near the Tresle Bridge, I saw him with Tonnerre boys. They were French half-breeds, the sons of Jules... I wouldn't have trusted any of them as far as I could spit" (p.127).

John happened to be very mischievous and irresponsible as a boy. Hagar has to worry about his safety. He used to walk on the rails on the trestle bridge thereby frightening his mother out of her wits.

"The trestle bridge was where the railway crossed the Wachakwa river a mile or so from town. The boys were

daring each other to walk across it. There were great gaps between the beams, so they teetered along the thin steel tracks as though they'd been walking a tightrope" (p. 128).

It is rather difficult for Hagar to control her naughty son. John has also taken a fancy to girl friends at the age of twelve. Hagar does not approve of his premature interest in the opposite sex. In this respect he resembles his father.

"He never introduced me to any of his girlfriends, and it was a longtime before I realized why one night in summer, thinking I heard a prowler in the garden, I went down and entered the big veranda quietly without turning on the lights. They were in the bushes, the two of them. I did 't mean to eavesdrop, but for a moment I couldn't move... He laughed too, and I could hear the murmur of their clothing as they tumbled and their hungry breathing as they kissed, and I ran like an angry ponderous shadow back to my room" (p.159).

Though Hagar does not want to intrude upon John's privacy, she does not approve of his behaviour either.

Intent upon improving the lot of John, Hagar invests some money in shares but unfortunately loses it. John has discontinued his education and therefore wants to work and earn. In a year he has two temporary jobs, one in a soft drink factory and one in a popcorn pushcarts. Again bored with life at Mr. Oatley' house and to escape from the maternal domination John goes away to Shipley place at Manawaka to take care of his father. When Hagar joins him at Shipley place, she is again shocked by John's irresponsible behaviour. One day she goes to the town with John to sell eggs. On the way John introduces Arlene Simmons (daughter of Telford and Lottie) to his mother, and later tells her that he does not want to marry Arlene, but wishes to lay her if he gets a chance. Hagar snaps at him angrily and asks him not to talk coarsely like that. Hagar further notices that John goes out after dinner in his car- buggy and returns at daybreak. But she does not ask him about it, as she knows he does not answer her properly.

One day she is surprised to know that Arlene brings John from a dancing party at the Legion Hall. John is feeling sick. The next morning John tells her that a boy in the dance hall beat him and that Arlene and her parents were there. Hagar feels deeply insulted by

her son's behaviour. She does not know how to control him. She, therefore, wants to return to the coast, but John is not willing to go with her.

Hagar is angry to know from Arlene that the latter wants to marry John. But Hagar warns her not to marry John as he has been drinking heavily for years, that neither of them has any money between them and that John is not the right man for her. But Arlene wants to improve him. John is thirty years old whereas, Arlene is twenty-eight years. Hagar advises John also not to marry Arlene as she belongs to a poor family. But John replies that marriage is his private concern. Hagar feels insulted by his insolence.

One day Hagar returns from town and takes rest in the front room. John and Arlene think that she has not returned home. Hagar silently overhears their talk. They want to get married as soon as Hagar is gone. Then they close the backdoor and have sex. Arlene wants to have a child by John. Hagar pities them for their passion combined with poverty. At the same time she is angry with them for desecrating her bed and clothes. Hagar goes to Lottie's house and talks to her about Arlene's infatuation for John and opines that they can marry a little later when their financial condition improves. But Little does not listen to Hagar's advice. Hagar strongly objects to Arlene's visit to her house. John angrily agrees not to bring her home any more. There is thus a lot of difference of opinion between mother and son. John wishes to escape from his mother's domination.

One afternoon, John comes home and tells Hagar that Arlene is going to East within two months, that he wants to bring her home every night and make her pregnant. Hagar scolds him severely and orders him not to do that and to avoid evil. Hagar seems to be irritated by John's irresponsible, shameless and mischievous pre-marital relationship with Arlene. She cannot rectify the behaviour of her son, as she could not rectify that of her husband.

Hagar's dream of settling John's life is shattered by Fate. Henry Pearl takes Hagar in his truck and tells her on the way how John met with an accident and is hospitalized now and how Arlene died on the spot itself. He further tells her details of the accident. John had drunk fully and drove his vehicle on the trestle bridge

when a goods train came and hit him. Hagar sees John lying unconscious in the hospital. After a few moments John opens his eyes, apologizes to his mother and dies. Hagar sees the dead body of Arlene sent to the funeral parlour. Hagar's struggle to give John a permanent and happy life has come to nothing. As a mother, she suffers a deep sense of loss. Getting reconciled to her fate, she sends all the furniture to Marvin's, assigns the sale of the Shipley place to a lawyer and returns to Mr. Oatley's house to stay.

Hagar has become a puppet at the hands of Fate. After her stay in Mr. Oatley's house for a year, Mr. Oatley dies, but luckily for her, he has left ten thousand dollars for her in his will. The money comes to her as a reward for her honest service to Mr. Oatley. Hagar buys a house with that money. She is no longer obligated to her late husband. In a way she has come into her own, by owning a house with self-earned money, though at a late stage of her life. She enjoys a bit of economic security now, but emotionally she has to depend upon her only surviving son Marvin and daughter-in-law, Doris. Here begins her third and last stage of life. In spite of all the past suffering like the loss of husband and of son, she has not lost her courage. Endowed with a strong *elan vital*, she continues to brave the vicissitudes of her life.

Hagar's life with her son and daughter-in-law is beset with many problems like her deteriorating health, assertive nature, and dependence upon other's mercy and clash of personalities. Although Marvin is duty-bound to take care of his mother, he is at time influenced by his wife Doris who does not have an equal attachment to Hagar because, she is, after all, only a daughter-in-law and not a daughter.

There is a conspicuous difference in the sensibilities of Hagar and Doris. Hagar has an aesthetic sensibility whereas, Doris lacks it. Hagar wears lilac silk on Sundays, though Doris does not like it. But Doris wears a mouse mask and likes drab coloured garments.

Hagar is now in the advanced age of ninety, whereas her son is sixty-five. She has to suffer the old age problems like ill health. She suffers from arthritis and other problems like chest pain and gastric trouble. Sometimes she falls down suddenly, and cannot walk properly. She feels she has grown fat because she did not use

foundation garments in her early life. Sometimes, she feels a sharp pain inside her ribs and experiences a breathing problem. Sometimes she farts uncontrollably. The varied problems of her health make her miserable. She has no choice but to live with them. One of the remarkable strands of her personality is that she has a great and admirable gusto for life. She never thinks of dying early. But her old age and its concomitants of ill health have, unfortunately, made her a parasite on her son and daughter-in-law.

She is very conscious of her deep attachment to her house, which she has bought with her own earning. She is no longer obligated to her late husband for his property. She is even proud of having been able to own a house of her own. She is deeply attached to her house and to the jug and a picture gifted to her by her own mother. She does not allow Doris and Marvin to have her oak chair and tells them that she is not going to die very soon. She is fond of her room and the pictures of her father and of her sons, Marvin and John. She has no picture of her husband.

There seems to be a generation gap and clash of ideas between Hagar and her son and daughter-in-law. Doris objects to her mother-in-law's ideas and to her calling Marvin a boy, though he is sixty-four years old and suffers from ulcer. But Hagar does not understand Doris's point of view, because of her egoism and adamancy.

Because of her ill health, Hagar requires almost around the clock attention from her son or daughter-in-law. They also attend to her inevitably. Hagar is so self-willed that she does not wish to yield to others in any matter. Once Marvin and Doris want to go to a movie and arrange for a sitter, Jill to take care of Hagar in the house. But Hagar objects to the arrangement so strongly that they cancel their programme of going to the movie. She does not understand how much inconvenience she is causing to her son and daughter-in-law. Far from adjusting herself to their life and mentality, she continues to remain adamant. The son and daughter-in-law feel it a burden on them to take care of her around the clock. One night Hagar discovers that her son and daughter-in-law have gone out of home without informing her. When they return, they tell Hagar gently that they would like to send her to a Nursing Home, where professional care will be taken of her. But Hagar shouts at them and does not want to leave her home.

“You make me sick and tired. I won’t go. I won’t go to that place. You’ll not get me to agree... If you make me go there, you’re only signing my death warrant. I hope that’s clear to you. I’d not last a month, not a week I tell you... How can I leave my house, my things? It’s mean it’s mean of you - oh, what a thing to do” (p.76).

Marvin and Doris yield to her sympathetically.

But the problems of ill health force Marvin and Doris to take Hagar to Doctor Corby’s hospital. Doctor Corby gives Hagar a white gown, examines her and recommends three X-Rays, of kidney, gall bladder and stomach. Then they return home. After supper all the three of them go for a drive in the countryside. Marvin and Doris take Hagar to see *Silver Threads* building. When the car stops outside the building, Hagar refuses to enter it lest she should have to stay there. She thinks inwardly.

“Can they force me? If I fuss and fume will they simply ask a brawny nurse to restrain me? Strap me into harness, will they? Make a madwoman of me? I fear this place exceedingly. I cannot even look. I don’t dare. Has it walls and windows, doors and do closets, like a dwelling? Or only walls? Is it a mausoleum, and I, the Egyptian, mummified with pillows and my own flesh through some oversight embalmed alive? There must be some mistake” (p. 96).

She shouts at her son disgustingly, “It’s mean, mean of you. I’ve not even any of my things with me” (p. 96). Then Marvin clarifies her doubt, “You don’t think we were bringing you here to stay, did you? We only wanted you to have a look at the place, Mother, that’s all” (p. 96). Hagar is finally convinced by Marvin and Doris. The matron of the Nursing Home gently conducts Hagar and shows her different parts of the building and offers her a cup of tea. During her all too brief a visit to the Nursing Home, Hagar observes that the nurses talk tauntingly and insultingly about the old women staying there like Mrs. Torlakson, Mrs. Steiner and Mrs. Tyrrwhitt. She also talks with a few patients who have varied experiences of life. She experiences a brief delirium before she is brought home.

Next time, Hagar is taken to the hospital where she is given barium to drink before her stomach is X-rayed. After the X-ray is over, Marvin and Doris tell her the doctor’s opinion that it is better

for her to be kept in a Nursing Home. But Hagar resents it strongly. When the priest Mr. Troy tries to reason with her, she rebuffs him with her down to earth realism, frankness and agnosticism. She proves to be a very tough woman in spite of her decrepitating health.

"Sometimes, you know, Mrs. Shipley, when we accept the things, which we can't change in this life, we find they're not half as bad as we thought."

"It's easy enough for you to say."

"Oh yes, indeed." His smooth face goes pink as a Mother's Day carnation. "But think of your daughter in-law. She is not as strong as she used to be, by any means. She's gladly cared for you for quite some time."

That is a do downright. Gladly, indeed. And she'd be crazy if she had been glad. Doris is none too bright, but she's not an imbecile. It's on the tip of my tongue to say it. But when I speak, I say something else.

"How can I leave my house? I don't want to leave my house and all my things"

"Of course, it's hard, I realize that," says Mr. Troy, although it seems to me he doesn't realize a blessed thing "Have you tried asking God's help? Prayer can do wonders, sometimes, in easing the mind."

So wistful is his voice that I'm on the verge of promising I'll try. Then the lie seems not inexpensive but merely cheap.

"I've never had much use for prayer. Mr. Troy. Nothing I prayed for ever came to anything."

"Perhaps you didn't pray for the right things."

"Well, who's to know? If God's a crossword puzzle, or a secret code, it's hardly worth the bother, it seems to me."

"I only meant we should pray for strength," he says, "not for our own wishes."

"Oh well, I've prayed for that, too, in my time, but I never thought it made much difference. I never was much of a one for church. Mr. Troy, I'll tell you frankly. But I prayed like sixty when trouble came, as every person does, whether they'll admit it or not, just in case. But nothing ever came of it" (pp. 119-120).

Hagar, thus, shocks and embarrasses the priest by her brutal frankness.

Once Hagar goes to a deserted fish cannery at Shadow Point by the seaside. The house is dark. She sees a seagull enter the house and tries to beat it in order to drive it out. She knows that it is a bad omen of death. She feels chest pain and weakness. She falls from the box on which she is sitting. Then she sits on the floor. There comes a stranger called Murray Lee who tells her his family history, and lends her his coat to cover herself. Hagar sleeps in the dark house at night. In the morning Marvin and Doris come there in search of her. Doris expresses his sense of shock.

“Oh, dear, you threw awful scare into us. Why should you go and do such a thing, anyway, Mother? When I came back from the store, and found you weren’t there, I nearly went out of my mind. It’s been so worrying for us, and we felt so awful, having to go to the police” (p. 251).

Hagar seems to be confused about her strange behaviour. Doris and Marvin thank Mr. Lees for saving their mother. They help her to get into the car. Although she wants to go home, they take her to the hospital as the doctor has opined that it is compulsory for her to do so now.

Initially she is kept in a general ward. Hagar feels that the whole world has shrunk into a hospital now. “Lord, how the world has shrunk. Now it is only one enormous room, full of high white iron cots, each narrow. And in each one a female body of some sort” (p. 254). Initially she refuses to take the pills, but the nurse forces them down her throat. She repeatedly feels pain in the chest and is administered pills by the nurses. She does not like the atmosphere of the hospital. She complains to Marvin about the sloppy food, noise at night, sleeplessness and lack of privacy. Marvin says that just as Hagar is not feeling well in the hospital, Doris is also not feeling well at home. However in spite of all the inconveniences of the hospital life, Hagar chums up with a few co-patients like Mrs. Reilly, Elva Jardine and a German woman. In spite of all the physical illness, Hagar never loses her zest for life. Marvin and Doris know in the heart of their hearts that Hagar may not live long. That is the reason why they treat her with sympathy and compassion. In the morning they bring flowers for her. Doris tells Hagar that her daughter Tina is getting married to a lawyer. Because of her filial love for the grand daughter, Hagar instinctively gives her ring to Doris to be presented to Tina.

At night when Hagar is asleep, she is shifted from the general ward to a semi-private room. Hagar befriends a young girl called Sandra there. In the morning Doris brings a priest, Mr. Troy who sings a prayer loudly and alone near Hagar. When Steven, a smart boy of thirty and grandson of Hagar sees her and tells her that Tina is getting married to August in the East and that Doris plans to fly there after sometime. Hagar is really surprised to know that Doris has not told her this detail perhaps because they are waiting for her death. She feels she is an inconvenience to them and perhaps has upset all their plans. Although the grand mother and the grand son remember the past, somehow the former cannot communicate with the latter, as he being young cannot understand the problems and predicament of her life. The relationship between the mother and the son is characterized by ambivalent feelings. Hagar is surprised to overhear Marvin talking to the nurse and referring to her as a 'holy terror.' Hagar is slowly nearing her death. Memories and symbols of death begin to occupy her consciousness. She remembers her past, especially her visit to the cemetery and her seeing of the stone-angel along with Marvin. What was once a symbol of death is going to be a reality now. She also imagines herself within a cocoon, which will be her private chamber of death. She knows that she has lived for ninety years, but could not change her adamant and non-compromising nature. She feels a terrible pain in her chest and needs an injection. The nurse gives her an injection. She feels thirsty and takes the glass of water from the nurse, drinks it and dies. Thus ends the life of Hagar Shipley, a self-willed woman who never compromised with anyone in her life-like her husband, sons and daughter-in-law. Part of her tragedy is ascribable to her own concealed pride, which bound her to chains. One may see a belated tragic awakening of knowledge about herself when she realizes that "Pride was my wilderness and the demon that led me there was fear, I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched" (p. 292). But again like a tragic figure, she has the courage to be reconciled to her lot. The blindness of her pride is symbolized by the blindness of the stone angel. She has the existential courage to face the problems of life without desecrating the institution of marriage and family.

Margaret Laurence has depicted the picture of Hagar Shipley from an inward knowledge of feminine psychology without any exaggeration or sentimentalism. She has shown how Hagar Shipley never loses her gusto for life in spite of all the varied problems and difficulties of her life. Hagar Shipley does not resort to philosophical resignation or religious disillusionment. On the contrary, she lives, enjoys and suffers every moment of life with intense feeling of attachment thereby proving to the world that life is beautiful and meaningful in spite of all hindrances and hardships that clutter it.

Primary Source

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Celebration of the Maternal Subjectivity in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*

—(Dr.) N.K.Prabhavathy

Maternal narratives interpret woman in an entirely different framework. The thematic significance of maternal subjectivity often precipitates the anguish of a class that has been silenced for long. Discourses on such topics foreground the predicament of women, particularly in a patriarchal situation. Woman being the central figure, these narratives explore maternity and related processes with an unbiased view. As for woman writers, often the delineation of woman's experience – whether maternal or not – offers them a chance for the exploration of the self from a woman's point of view. Since writers reconstruct maternal subjectivity against the backdrop of the institution of family, maternal narratives also become instrumental in highlighting an institution, the significance of which is receding fast in the modern times. The family serves as fertile background where the story of the absent/present mother is unfolded.

Motherhood and mothering gained significance in the later stages of feminist movement. Feminism evaluated motherhood under the oppression of patriarchy. It also ushered in a revival of interest in the feminine attributes of woman. This trend can be seen

in the theorization of motherhood and mothering. The ideology of motherhood, as seen in the recent fiction, explores the maternal from a different perspective, that places woman far above her biological role of reproduction. The maternal narrative is no longer the mere depiction of woman, bearing and rearing her children. Maternal subjectivity also highlights the power of the mother which she acquires during the period of her motherhood.

Womanhood and motherhood are not synonymous terms, nor do they indicate similar experience for all women. The concept of motherhood has been well explored over the ages by writers – both men as well as women. Maternal love has always reigned supreme among human emotions and nothing else can substitute it. Maternal narratives explore mother's experiences as life-giver. Childbirth and child nurturing are profound experiences of woman in the socio-cultural context. Besides, maternal narratives focus on woman's vulnerability, her strength and emotional fulfilment. Woman is caught in her concern for her children. Nevertheless, childbirth and mothering are equally important in the life of a mother. Margaret Laurence's novel *The Stone Angel* (1964) is the story of Hagar who learns "mothering" at the age of ninety.

In her essay on *The Stone Angel*, Constance Rooke considers the novel as one dealing with old age. She has coined the term "Vollendungsroman" (31) which means a novel of "completion" or "winding up". This term can be applied to *The Stone Angel*. The protagonist of the novel is Hagar, one of the most memorable characters in Canadian fiction. In the words of Rooke, the novel is a silent discourse of the protagonist, who is "rampant with memory" (3). The narrative projects the image of Hagar – an old woman of ninety – with her uncompromising pride, raging towards freedom in the end. The narrator is Hagar herself, who scans her past intermittently, since the past and the present are juxtaposed. She plays multiple roles in the novel – as a daughter, wife, mother and grandmother. Laurence's focus on maternal subjectivity offers a chance to examine Hagar's motherhood and its implications in her life.

Woman's biological role in reproduction involves physical as well as psychological activities, centered on the terrain of the

institution of family. The bond between the mother and children undoubtedly requires a closer look. Laurence has portrayed the invisible link between Hagar and her dead mother with dexterity. The titular significance of the novel is related to these two women characters.

The stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery is a maternal icon. Though it occupies only a limited space in the graveyard, the proliferating images seem to occupy the whole space in the novel. The statue, located above the town, on the hill, is a monument made of expensive Italian marble. Jason Currie, Hagar's father – "a self-made man" (6) – had imported it in memory of his wife. Hagar's insightful remark introduces the statue to the readers:

I wonder if she stands there yet, in memory of her who relinquished her feeble ghost as I gained my stubborn one, my mother's angel that my father bought in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day (1).

The statue acquires significance in the novel, not as a monument of the mother, but as a symbol of the daughter. "The doubly blind" statue symbolizes Hagar's blindness since she fails to see life-affirming values, as a result of which she gets estranged from others. The cold marble statue conveys a coded message to the readers.

Mother-daughter relation has become one of the fascinating themes in contemporary women's fiction. Quite often, writers examine not only the bond between the two, but also the mother's contribution to the daughter – directly or indirectly – which comes to her rescue in the hour of crisis. The strategies used by Laurence to project maternal subjectivity in the novel can be found in Hagar's role as a daughter as well as a mother. In this context, the mother-daughter relation involves an analysis of three generations. By erasing the existence of the mother, the writer places Hagar in a delicate situation from the moment she is born. Besides, young Hagar is shown growing up in a patriarchal surrounding, internalizing values which in no way help her to recognize her own femininity. The silenced maternal subjectivity is revived when Hagar becomes a mother of two boys.

Hagar's mother died when she was born. Hagar never forgave her mother for abandoning her. This thought filled her with bitterness. She considered her mother as a synonym for frailty and hence she hated all who were weak. When her young brother Dan lay dying, Matt, her elder brother, asked her to put on the old plaid shawl of her mother and hold him for a while to soothe him. Hagar rejected his request outright. She says:

But all could think of was that meek woman I'd never seen,
the woman Dan was said to resemble so much and from
whom he'd inherited a frailty I could not help but detest,
however much a part of me wanted to sympathize. To play
at being her – it was beyond me (25-26).

These words of Hagar have to be seen in the right perspective as her action explains why she has failed to play the role of a mother to her dying brother. This, and many other instances reveal her inability "to mother" even when her sons expect her to do so.

The narrator's rigidity points to her frozen emotions, which call for a thorough probe into her psyche. Virtually, her petrified self has become a stone. Her pride resists any attempt to stoop down even when the situation demands it. The Scottish Presbyterian upbringing, coupled with the patriarchal discipline of her father had indeed wiped out any softness which could have crept into her almost stealthily. This fact is revealed when we examine the type of gender socialization she had gone through as a young girl. She was brought up with her two brothers. Jason Currie was very proud of his daughter. Once Hagar overheard her father talking about her to Auntie Doll: "Smart as a whip, she is, that one if only she'd been" (3). Obviously, Laurence tries to project gender discrimination prevailing in the society.

Hagar's petrified emotions force her to reject her own femininity. She fails in her duties of mothering. Suppression of the maternal, distances her from her children. Her hostility towards her dead mother and the adoration of her father, known for his materialistic outlook lead her astray.

"It is in maternity that woman fulfils her physiological destiny" (Beauvoir 501). But maternity was a totally different experience for Hagar. Her resentment against Bram Shipley, her husband, lingered in her soul even after she gave birth to Marvin.

His unrefined manners repelled her. She tried to reform him but in vain: "I spoke my disgust in no uncertain terms, not for the first time. It had gone on for years, but my words never altered him" (85).

When Marvin was born Hagar tried to make peace with her offended father. She made clear that if he chose, he could come and stay with her at the Shipley place. But he never came. Hagar's rambling thoughts now made her admit the truth: "Perhaps he didn't feel as though Marvin was his grandson. I almost felt that way myself, to tell the truth, only with me it was even more. I almost felt as though Marvin weren't my son" (66). Hagar's guilt surfaces in her life-review only at a very late stage. The retrospective enables her to decipher the truth. She had even failed to judge her son. When Doris cautioned her against upsetting Marvin with her blunt statements, she snapped these words: "There is a boy who never gets upset, not even at what happened to his own brother" (69). Needless to say, Hagar refers to the tragic death of John, her second son.

The narrator remembers another occasion when she failed to reveal her concern for Marvin. When the war came he enlisted himself in the army. He was barely seventeen then. She could have stopped him, but she didn't. Her justification was that she should not dissuade him when he fulfilled his duty to his country. At the time of parting, suddenly she became aware of his vulnerability as a young farm boy: "I wanted all at once to hold him tightly, plead with him, against all reason and reality, not to go" (139). Once again she failed in her role as a mother. Her uncompromising pride held her back.

To make matters worse, when Doris and Marvin were planning to dispose of the house, Hagar would not allow them to do so. Yet, if they did, she would file a suit against Marvin. Even at the age of ninety Hagar clung to her possessions. She had inherited this materialistic outlook from her father who had transported the most expensive Italian marble as the monument of his wife.

The narrator had high hopes for her second son. She wanted to give him the best. She had hopes of sending him to college. Her blind attitude and possessive love could only ruin him. She also failed to conceal her excessive love for John from Marvin. Hagar became frantic when Marvin insisted that she must be put in a nursing home. There, he said, she would get the care she needed as

well as the company of those of her age. Hagar cut him short with her remark: "If it were John, he'd not consign his mother to the poor house" (81). Hagar's discrimination between her two sons only helped to estrange them from her.

At the Manawaka cemetery, acting according to his mother's suggestions, John tried to raise the toppled marble statue from the ground. The proud mother muses: "I wish he could have looked like Jacob then, wrestling with the angel and besting it, wringing a blessing from it with his might" (194). John disappointed his mother when he swore, while struggling to lift the statue. Every time she turned to him with high expectation, she met with the same disappointment. As a mother she had failed to judge her two sons.

As a *Vollendungsroman*, *The Stone Angel* can be considered as an attempt to capture the "dying light" of Hagar's life. This task has not been a formidable one for the author, since she has chosen to depict an old woman who rages against her fate. Perhaps, Hagar can be summed up in the best way in Marvin's words when he remarks to the nurse that his mother is a "holy terror" (332). None the less, Hagar's hidden fear of losing her home cannot be overlooked. The reference to "SILVERTHREADS" (57), the nursing home for old people, has great relevance today since it serves to highlight the anguish of the old, who lead an isolated life at the fag end of their lives. Absence of love and companionship is a curse that threatens this group. The classified ad in the newspaper ironically reveals this truth:

Only the Best will **Do for Mother** (57)

These words eloquently express the specialized care that a mother needs in her declining years. It unleashes the suppressed agony of the narrator and she becomes breathless.

The enraged mother reacted at once. She told Doris, her daughter-in-law, that Marvin should give up the idea of selling their house. She could not bear the thought of losing things which were dear to her. She loved them all possessively – the knobbled jug of blue and milky glass, her mother's picture in an oval frame of gilt and black velvet, the gilt-edged mirror from the Currie house, her own picture at twenty and the cut-glass decanter with the silver top, Bram's wedding gift to her.

The narrator's gypsy nature is highlighted by evoking similarities between her and Meg Merrilies, the central figure in Keats's poem. The image of Meg is brought to Hagar's mind when she needed courage to strengthen her. The occasion is when, like a refugee, she flees to Shadow point in order to escape from being sent to the nursing home. Freedom for Hagar is as essential as the air she breathes. She says with conviction, "I'm like Meg Merrilies" (163). Surprisingly, she still remembers the song she has read more than forty years earlier.

Old Meg she was a gipsy,
And lived upon the moors;
Her bed it was the brown heath turf,
And her house was out of doors (164).

The wilderness links them together. But the wilderness of Meg "was out of doors" whereas that of Hagar was within. Laurence has portrayed this psychological wilderness with dexterity. "Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, geography of the mind" (18-19), says Atwood. *The Stone Angel* justifies it.

The Canadian experience of alienation has been variously interpreted by writers – Canadians and others. Margaret Atwood, in her seminal work, *Survival : A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, refers to the identity crisis of the Canadians (17) which causes their alienation. The postcolonial situation in Canada offers a congenial atmosphere for identity crisis. The peculiar nature of Canadian geography also plays a significant role in this phenomenon. The Canadian wilderness, with its vast tracts of snow, endless prairies and innumerable lakes represent the inner lives of the Canadians. An exploration of the mysterious wilderness is "a journey to the interior" – an exploration of the psyche.

Laurence's novel projects the wilderness that prevails in Hagar. The uncompromising pride of Hagar is her wilderness. In Canadian literature nature is often compared to woman. Even the fictional town of Manawaka represents a state of mind.

Hagar's alienation from others is conspicuous enough. Her emotional sterility hinders her from interacting with the outside world. The proud daughter of a proud father, she considers herself far superior to her friends. Her husband too experiences her

contempt for him. Her self fails to function in the normal way as it has split into two. The source of her real problem can be traced to her lack of self-knowledge.

Canadian fiction has portrayed the attempts of women protagonists to overcome their marginalization and occupy the centre. This is achieved by acquiring self-knowledge. The process of self-realization in Atwood's *Surfacing* and *The Stone Angel* shows similarities. Both these protagonists come to terms with their femininity by accepting the maternal. The narrator in *Surfacing* rejects maternity by undergoing abortion. She is haunted of memories of the traumatic experience. She receives the message of maternity from her dead mother and decides to conceive again. Hagar detests her mother who has "saved her death" (63) for her daughter and not her sons. She says: "I used to wonder what she'd been like, that docile woman, and wonder at her weakness and my awful strength" (63). In a moment of epiphany she realizes her weakness. By failing to rejoice in life she has failed in her motherhood. The realization of the truth bolsters her and steers her towards "mothering" which she has failed to accomplish. Though the episodes of mothering are few in number they indicate that her self is no longer a split one. She becomes a whole. Self-realization is a humanising experience which serves as a strategy of writers whose feminist concern is to project the liberation of woman from oppression.

Hagar's transformation that follows her self-discovery has been portrayed vividly. Laurence highlights Hagar's emotional sterility with such candour that one can trace its origin in her childhood. Her absent mother is partly responsible for the barrenness of her mind. Her father's strict upbringing only made matters worse for the girl. Mr. Troy's enquiry about her desire to pray only brought out the fury within her. "I've held out this long", I reply. "I may as well hold out a while longer" (316). One can see her raging against God too.

After listening to Mr. Troy's prayer song she was struck by the shattering truth. She has failed to rejoice in her life though she always wanted to do so. This indeed is a moment of epiphany when she discovers her pride as her flaw:

Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shacked all I touched (318).

Before she dies, she is able to indulge in acts of mothering which are signs of her transformations. At the hospital, risking her own safety, she carries the bedpan for Sandra, a young girl who had undergone surgery. Later she proudly recalls this incident as one of the "truly free acts" (334), the other is her action of blessing her son – a lie uttered with love.

She shocks her daughter-in-law by offering a sapphire ring to Tina, her grand-daughter, when she comes to know about her marriage. Doris has seen her quite possessive about her personal belongings. Hagar's words are like the confession of a sinner: "What is it to me? I should've given it to you, I suppose, years ago. I could never bear to part with it. Stupid. Too bad you never had it. I don't want it now. Send it to Tina" (304). Definitely, Hagar's desire to part with this precious item indicates a kind of thawing on her side. She is no longer fully petrified.

When Marvin arranged a semi-private room in the hospital for her comfortable stay, she wanted to thank him, but would not. Doris tried to impress her by pointing it out that the room was in the new wing. Hagar's reply was, "That's all I need,... A new wing" (305). Needless to say, all that she needs at ninety is a new wing which may enable her to fly towards independence.

The epigraph of the novel, "Do not go gentle into that good night/Rage rage against the dying of the light", serves as an insightful comment on the character of Hagar. These lines of Dylan Thomas highlight Hagar's tumultuous life and her raging against the imminent death. She towers over others with her irrepressible zest for life. The story of Hagar is a story of metamorphosis. It is the life-review of a mother, who makes a final earnest attempt "to become" a mother. Significantly, the novel concludes with the mother-word "There. There" (71).

Laurence's vision of motherhood and her portrayal of Hagar have endeared her to her readers. The scene in which Hagar is seen like an angel blessing her son, leaves an indelible impression on the readers. Laurence's narrative strategies to depict maternal

subjectivity, are not very common. *The Stone Angel* occupies an enviable position in the narrative space of Canadian literature, which projects a “proud” mother, who comes to terms with her own femininity, by accepting the maternal.

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8

Journey Towards the Peaceable Kingdom: A Reading of Margaret Laurence's *The Fire- Dwellers*

—Dr. (Mrs.) L. Judith Sophia

The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre –
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

— T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

In the post-modern scenario, the world glows with new scientific methods each day in every respect and the human attitude goes towards deterioration. Modern man's life and his future remain inundated with the ongoing uncertainty of infiltrated violence in every sphere. Consequently, the traditional socio-cultural systems like marriage, family, religion, etc. are distorted. However, Margaret Laurence, a Canadian literary giant has created a "peaceable kingdom" amidst chaos and disintegration in her literary rendering, **The Fire-Dwellers.***

The **Fire-Dwellers**, at the surface level, deals with the problems encountered by a woman in provincial Canada. It sketches the physical landscape, geographical locales, social structures and

familial relationship which set the background of the novel's action added to the mapping of an interior mindscape of the narrator and protagonist Stacey MacAindra, the married sister of Rachel Cameron. Her story concerns more with the violence in many forms and the world she lives in is characterised by 'brutality and deception' as she expresses: "Doom everywhere is the message I get" (FD 52). This generates her personal and social fears. Unlike Rachel in *A Jest of God*, and Hagar in *The Stone Angel*, Stacey is alive enough to identify the human need in others and constantly strives to reach out to others. The novel ends with Stacey's reconciliation with herself, with God and others and she looks forward to a new life with a new understanding.

The journey of Stacey's life is like that of Hagar's and Rachel's, the same pilgrimage from the old Covenant to the new, but unlike them, Stacey does not have the symbolic Old Testament name. Barbara Pell observes: "Dwelling in the inferno of contemporary society, Stacey attempts to earn salvation through the law (of suburban – housewife perfection) and the prophets (of Polyglam)" (1). Being threatened by the personal and social chaos and nuclear holocaust, she tries to run away from the 'inferno' and seeks protection under Luke's wings in his cabin, away from the city. Much later, Stacey realizes the reality and identifies that her home is the place where she is needed; with that realization she returns home in the end and attains maturity through life's shocking moments and through mother-daughter relationship.

The title of the novel, **The Fire-Dwellers**, signifies the central metaphor – which is located in a big city, Vancouver. The city symbolizes a hell and its inhabitants are damned. A peaceful life is denied to the dwellers of this city; they are obsessed with "devilish manifestation of aberration, cruelty and desperation, and the whole lit with hellish flames" (Thomas 118) of destruction, violence, accidents etc. Their life becomes violent and purposeless, filled with the constant fear of themselves and their children and often they are found alienated not only from their families but also from themselves.

Stacey MacAindra, the central character of the novel has grown up in Manawaka and drifted to Vancouver, where she

struggles with her four children, and an 'overworked husband'. She is upset not only by her personal and family problems, but also by the social unrest and her fear of living in the midst of a world of disaster and violence. "She is a fire-dweller", rightly argues Kertzer, "trapped in the flames of modern society" (224). John Coldwell visualizes that she is "a spiritually isolated housewife and mother threatened by domestic and social chaos which she fears both as personal hell fire and nuclear holocaust" (cited in Vevaina 122). A vision of violence through television, newspaper and magazines focuses this city as a terrible and chaotic one. She says that all she knew is what she reads in the papers. In Clara Thomas's words: "a universe that seems on the brink of conflagration" (116). Stacey is surrounded by an "apocalyptic world of sudden senseless death" (Thomas 117). She fears: "What will happen when the horsemen of the Apocalypse ride through this town?" (FD 49). The horsemen in the Apocalypse are the embodiments of sin, bloodshed, famine and death during the Great Tribulation revealed by the Holy Spirit to St. John in Revelation 6:1-8. This destruction of the Universe – "the threatened holocaust of the Apocalypse" (Persando 90) seems to overwhelm her world of daily quarrels and trivialities. In one of her dreams, Stacey sees the world on fire: "The hillside is burning" (FD 25). Stacey remains unable to lead her children to a greener world. She is powerless either to transform the circumstances or to escape from it; she is left to live in the torture of the fire element.

The title of the novel and the epigraphs with which the novel begins combine the inner and outer fires of the protagonist. The first epigraph from Carl Sandburg's "Losers" expresses the fiddling in a world on fire and hints that action is meaningless. The second epigraph, which is a nursery rhyme as well:

Ladybird, Ladybird
Fly away home;
Your house is on fire,
Your children are gone. (FD 1)

reflects Stacey's fears. "Private fears echo public horrors" (Morley 192). In Stacey's society the presence of death is everywhere around her, which takes many forms: suicide, automobile accident, police bullets, bombing and maiming. For instance, the city she lives in assumes the other city (Hiroshima):

The buildings at the heart of the city are brash, flashing with colors, solid and self-confident. Stacey is reassured by them, until she looks again and sees them charred, open to the impersonal winds, glass and steel broken like vulnerable live bones, shadows of people frog-splayed on the stone like in that other city. (FD 8-9)

Stacey thinks that her “children will need to know this city” (FD 6) with all its violence and they will have to strive to the core. She admires the sea-gulls for their simple knowledge of survival. She sees them as “Birds in prophet form” with “angelic presences and voices like gravel out of a grave” (FD 7). Stacey is afraid of the dangers which lurk in the wild city streets of Vancouver and about the world which the public media or the Ever-Open Eye (TV) constantly informs her:

Eight-thirty news bombers last night claimed a decisive victory four villages totally destroyed and a number of others set ablaze. (FD 83)

Her panic is genuine as she thinks “anything could happen to anybody. Anything” (FD 189-190).

This “violent chaotic, external world both causes and parallels her inner chaos” (Nancekivell 58). The violence is present not only in the world around Stacey as announced by Radio and the images of Television but she slowly recognizes her own capacity for violence and is terrified by the idea of hurting her own children. The fight between Ian and Duncan, her sons aged ten and seven makes her recall “Cain and his brother must have started their hatred like this” (FD 13). Out of rage Stacey has “grabbed their shoulders and flung them both to the floor with as much force as she could muster” (FD 13). While realizing her action: “Am I a monster?”, she seeks help from above to bring up them with healthy mind: “God how can I make all this better as if it hadn’t happened?” (FD 14). Simultaneously she is reminded of the event of a young mother who killed her two months old infant by smothering it (FD 14).

Stacey’s inner confusion is expressed as an aspect of voice and time, the voice of past and present. Sometimes she complains: “I’m surrounded by voices all the time but none of them seem to be saying anything, including mine” (FD 152) and other times a failure of communication. She fears that she is unable to communicate or is remaining trapped in her skull. Even after twenty years of their

marriage, Mac and Stacey find it difficult to communicate their fears. Stacey remains resentful while Mac remains silent. Morley points out, "Mac, her husband, is less prone to physical violence but his icy calm is a different (and perhaps worse) form of rage" (100). Most of the time Mac prefers to be silent when Stacey approaches him to share her joys and sorrows. Ian inherits his father's tight-lipped controls. Mac's puritan restraint has been bred in him by his clergyman father, Matthew. Mac's repressed emotions thus prevail with his strange and dangerous silence is another form of violence. Nacekivell identifies the interaction between Mac and Stacey as "Mechanical interaction" (160). The temperamental difference gradually destroys the harmony and sense of fulfilment.

Their broken communication is caused by lack of trust and understanding. These temperamental polarities create a sense of isolation and force them to cultivate extra-marital relationships. As Vevaina rightly points out, "Stacey's alienation from others is largely due to the problems inherent in the nature of human communication which mainly includes words and gestures" (135). Her experience of broken conversation with her husband induces in her the fear of unwantedness and insecurity. She imagines that they are both parallel lines and "on being parallel cannot ever meet" (FD 176). She realizes the problem that everyone in her society, including herself, wears a social mask on the real inner self and "Each one lives in his or her private hell convinced that the other is better than oneself and uses language to create and sustain the mask" (Vevaina 136). Stacey often feels alienated and withdraws herself and speaks within her own self imagining that others have a better life than her and also hears voices within her skull.

The illusions of the world of business and advertising through the media intensify Stacey's alienation from herself. "Mephistophelian in its pursuit of dollars, the world of business and advertising has raised deception to the level of a fine art in North American society and masks its violence with attractive facades" (Vevaina 128). Though, Stacey attempts to resist the materialism prevailing in her society, she often falls a prey to it. The illusory business creates a fervour among the people of modern society who are lured by the attractive advertisements and deceive themselves by falling a prey to them. In order to fit into the society she lives in,

Stacey dresses appropriately, gets plastic kitchenware and plays the role of a “business man’s elegant wife” (Kertzer 287). To achieve a secure sense of value, the society has formed organizations like “Richalife” and the “Polyglam”.

A fast thriving of pseudo-cults and ‘isms’ display the absence of genuine religious faith in Stacey’s society. Media and business replace the Old symbols of God and Church and the supermarket becomes almost a place of worship where a large number of women throng with the hope “that the acquisition of things will alleviate their feelings of emptiness and desperation” (Vevaina 129). The aisles of the supermarket are like that of a temple and chapels to Stacey. And “Music hymning from invisible choirs” (FD 65) doubtlessly indicates that music is carefully chosen to con the housewives. When describing the beauty parlour, Stacey uses religious terms like “The priestess are clad in pale mauve smocks”, working busily on a client and sinks her hair “into a chair in front of the grapefruit yellow basin” and she is left to lean “back her head to receive the benediction of the shampoo” (FD 87). These silent hairdressers, appear in Stacey’s eyes, as empty “priestesses promising instant perfection but communicating nothing, sharing nothing” (Packer 128). This material world with all its pseudo promises creates in the city dwellers nothing but a spiritual sterility as in T.S. Eliot’s “Waste Land” and makes them experience void and utter hopelessness.

‘Richalife’, a pseudo religion, started in Stacey’s society is a secular parody of the religious image of the Promised Land, which promises rejuvenation through vitamin pills. It gives false promises: “Richalife – Not Just vitamins – A New Concept – A New Way of Life. With testimonials. Both Spirit and Flesh Altered” (FD 28). Thor Thorlakson, “the provincial manager” is the prophet of this pseudo religion, who preaches the good news: “the shackles have been lifted” (FD 33). His straight appearance gives a celestial vision to Stacey: “His suit is a costly blue-gray, giving the impression of a luminous uniform, a doorman in heaven or perhaps a male bearer behind the celestial throne” (FD 33). Richalife promises to cure anxiety, depression and lack of energy through its colourful pills. Thor is a symbol of threatening emptiness, a self proclaimed false

priest, offering no peace and no compassion, towering above others, in an expensive suit which resembles a “luminous uniform” of a door-man in heaven.

‘Polyglam’ is broader than the Richalife rallies and has established on the same theme. The ‘plastic lady’ is oracle trickster-magician and she masks her fear of ageing under garish make up. Like the Richalife material, the ‘Polyglam’ booklet offers the attractive lie of peaceful happy families with “Polyglam Superware”. All these artificial movements materialize the religious principles with false promises, “attractive lies” which can never be fulfilled at the end. In this modern city ‘the old symbols of order have broken down’ and a kind of spiritual emptiness is created through these pseudo-cults. Stacey mourns for her loss of secure, faith and belief. Hence, she cannot force her children to participate in such forms of worship. “And the new symbols of authority”, opines Clara Thomas “T.V (“the eye”), radio, newspaper, films, business such as Polyglam plastics or Richalife vitamins, which exploit people’s fear and vanity – are terrifying in their power” (119). In the novel, Laurence thus focuses on a society, which lacks faith at its core and women who are the centre of the present generation who have also lost their faith.

Feeling rejected by Mac and her children, Stacey finds Buckle Fennick sexually attracted though she dislikes his mannerisms. She accepts a ride in his truck and at his place, in the presence of the blind mother, he enjoys masturbation before Stacey’s eyes – keeping her as an onlooker. He thus seeks revenge on Mac through Stacey because of Mac’s refusal to acknowledge him in Thor’s presence. His exaggeration to Mac that he and Stacey have been to bed together makes Mac painful and he suspects his wife of committing adultery, which concomitantly disturbs their marital bondage.

Buckle’s lie enacts as a “two-edged sword”, which cuts her relationship with Mac and Mac’s relationship with Buckle. She mourns within herself: “He’s really hurt. And I’d like to comfort him but how can I – it’s I who’ve caused it. I want to go away by myself. Right away. Far” (FD 143). Her yearning is to go away from this place, from the problem and from the harsh reality. Lack of proper communication leads to further chaos in their familial life. Stacey

reacts suddenly not in despair but in action. She gets her 'chev' and drives frantically towards the seashore. There she meets a young artist, Luke Venturi and later goes back twice to his isolated cabin and makes love with him.

Like Rachel and Hagar, Stacey finds in Luke Venturi, though a stranger refuge. He offers her intimacy and self-confidence she needs. Luke, in **The Fire-Dwellers** is an Italian who lives outside Vancouver in a peaceful natural setting where Stacey hears no voice except those of birds. Luke functions symbolically of the Biblical Luke; he is a physician, a counsellor and a healer to Stacey, who not only provides her with physical satisfaction, but also listens patiently to her woes. As Vevaina puts it: "In the manner of his biblical namesake, this twenty-four year old Italian youth helps heal Stacey's fragmented psyche and regain contact with her Eros" (144). His straightforward communication makes her overjoy and she finds a confidant in Luke and voices her feelings and thoughts to him. He identifies Stacey with water and calls her "merwoman" because of her sudden appearance on the seashore, in front of his cabin. He asks her after hearing her talk: "Come out, from wherever you're hiding yourself" (FD 161). Thus he helps her look momentarily as an individual being, liberated from various roles: wife, mother and housekeeper. After having had self-healing, Stacey feels:

I'd like to start again, everything, all of life, start again with someone like you – with you – with everything simpler and clearer. No lies. No recriminations. No unmerry-go-round of pointless words. Just everything plain and good (FD 184).

Luke plays the role of a saviour giving her what she desperately needs. She learns to accept her self as it is and withdraws herself from Luke while having realized that she is of his mother's age. From this affair, Stacey re-discovers her power to act for herself and takes a conscious decision not to attempt to make any romantic escapade with Luke from her family and responsibilities.

Stacey, undergoes the process of self judgment, self understanding and self-realization. Being a product of the Presbyterian upbringing, Stacey analyses herself and her deeds. "She has a genius for self-recrimination" writes Kertzer, and as she surveys her life; she traces, "the chain of guilt right back to Original

“Sin” (286). Stacey probes her heart : “Where did it start ? Everthing goes too far back to be traced. The roots vanish, because they don’t end with Matthew, even if it were possible to trace them that far. They go back and back forever. Our father Adam” (FD 149). She recalls St. Paul’s statement and questions even after not fulfilling his principles of marriage. When the burning desire rises in her she expresses: “Better to marry than burn, St. Paul said, but he didn’t say what to do if you married and burned” (FD 188). Like Hagar and Rachel, Stacey is afraid, but her fear is related to the world around her as well as the world within. She is even afraid of her loss of self-control. The process of realization ends with the identification of her as a mother of four children and her duties to protect them from all the terrors of life. Unlike Rachel and Hagar, Stacey is overwhelmed by her eagerness to “know other better, to reach and feel the blood and passion beneath the skin of others” (Packer 128). She even yearns for more openness in others with an honest expression of feelings and thoughts. She learns that a perfect communication between individual is necessary to strengthen human relationships.

Stacey, like the other central characters, manages to keep herself as ordinary and unique. She suffers with the roles forced upon her by society, by the Presbyterian small town Canadian background and by her own individual personality and yet manages to cope with emerging familial issues and even prevails. She suffers and endures in the materialistic modern society. Stacey’s journey in this novel is partly a journey into comfortable self-acceptance. She always has known herself and been honest with herself but yet doesn’t feel comfortable with herself. She realizes that she is not the sole person dwelling in fire and she cannot control the fires of fate but, however, manages to survive with her own fires. She is even matured enough to accept the losses and knows how to control those losses. “One of the losses over which Stacey laments”, as Miriam Packer identifies, “is the loss of her youth” and “part of her struggle throughout the novel is the struggle to retain her youthful identity, her innocence and her hope” (129). At last, she strives to achieve her youthful identity, by accepting her responsibility and regains her hope for the future as she requests God to grant her forty more years.

Laurence explores the Canadian society’s lack of faith in **A Jest of God** and **The Fire-Dwellers**. Both Rachel and Stacey have

lost their faith, in fact they "have never had their faith" (Buss 50). Both expose their lack of faith in their own peculiar characteristic way. Stacey with her own doubts speaks to God. Unaware of His power she calls him "Sir" and tries to see equality with the deity and guesses what he must think of herself (FD 8). She courageously questions the existence of God in her own lack of faith. Stacey, sometimes scolds God for lacking maternal point of view and says to him that if he wants to know human misery he should get himself born as a mother next time: Listen here, God [. . .]. You try bringing up four kids. Don't tell me you've brought up countless millions [. . .]. So next time you send somebody down here, get It born as her with seven young or a him with a large family" (FD 150). It is visible that Stacey keeps God consciously away as a supreme being who, according to her, cannot be with ordinary human beings, and experience their everyday life. *The Bible* teaches us that God created man in His own image, but in this novel Stacey, in her confused state creates God in her image. And this image varies considerably along with her own psychic changes and circumstances. Her conversations with God consist of cathartic effect and they fulfill her need for a confidant as displayed in her words: "God knows why I chat with you, God – it's not that I believe in you. Or I do and don't like the echoes in my head. It's somebody to talk to. Is that all ? I don't know" (FD 57). Stacey longs to have some pattern amidst her chaotic life situations through her spiritual quest for survival.

The image of God, in this novel fluctuates from an authoritarian, omnipotent being to the one who helps in her utter helplessness. She often converses with a God in whom she does and does not have 'belief'. As Morley puts it, Stacey's "Talking with God is also talking to the unmasked self; questions remain largely unanswered but can be faced with some degree of honesty" (104). She often withdraws into herself and talks to God. In Stacey's generation the breakdown in communication is extended to religion. Stacey envisages Matthew, her father-in-law, a retired ordained minister, as a man of no religious problems. She is touched when she hears Matthew's revealing of his life long doubt. He has little conviction or confidence in his belief and receives little comfort

from it. He even confesses his lack of understanding of his own son Mac and his failure to bring him up in strong true faith: "But I never told him that. I wanted him to grow up with some strong background of faith. But he didn't. The reason must have passed them on even though I never spoke them" (FD 253). Stacey, at times mourns for her lack of faith and feels guilty about the "indifference with which her children regard God and the church" (Vevaina 135). She often feels that she has failed in her duty to bring up her children in this manner. Stacey's longing for the transcendent reality is seen through her nostalgic worships with the singing of favourite hymns of childhood, which states the theme that God is too high to be praised by mortal tongue :

Ye holy angels bright
Who wait at God's right hand
Or through the realms of light
Fly at your Lord's command,
Assist our song,
Or else the theme too high doth seem
For mortal tongue (FD 62-63).

While warbling the hymn she mourns for her disbelief.

Stacey yearns for the strength from above to survive in this world of fire. Returning from Buckle's Place, after his death Stacey laments : "What I lack is strength. Enough strength. Enough calm" (FD 212) and pleads with God to grant this as a last resort. Her longing for grace is brought out in her soliloquy: "But the grace isn't given" (FD 276) while she realizes the "notion of nothing, of total dark" region in her. Once, she goes to the extent of asking for forgiveness : "Dear Lord, and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways" (FD 259). Like Jacob, she wrestles with God, for the safety of her children : "God, let him be all right, and I'll never want to get away again, I promise. If it was anything I did, take it out on me, not on him, that's too much punishment for me" (FD 263, 264). Eventually, Stacey demands: "Give me another forty years, Lord, and I may mutate into a matriarch" (FD 277). The time span she requires is that of 'Israelites' desert exile' during their journey to the Promised Land. She aspires to evolve into a female pioneer of a new dynasty. Stacey often fails to see God as a healing presence within

her. Yet her belief in God is so strong that it is revealed unconsciously in her crises.

Stacey desires to come out of her costume of middle-aged house wife in 'Chapeau' and conservative dress : "I want to explain. Under this chapeau lurks a mermaid, a whore, a tigress" (FD 9). She likes to come into the lives of the others around her, the real lives of Mac, her children, Tess, and Thor and Buckle, to know the real lives behind their masks, to know more about their needs and feelings. She fantasizes about a real utopia, a place where people can reach each other: "Out there in unknown houses are people who live without lies, and who touch each other. One day she will discover them, pierce through to them. Then everything will be all right, and she will live in the light of the morning" (FD 79). She hopes to perceive the morning light (the light of God) which illuminates every hidden thing. She imagines a world with no lies and a real relationship among its dwellers who live with open-mindedness and without any hypocrisy. Unlike Hager, she stretches out her hands to reach the others around her.

Stacey finds relief from a number of crises in her life. The suicidal attempt of Tess, Stacey's discovery of Thor's hidden identity and his denied painful youth as Vernon Winkler, teach her that the genuine passion of people lies under the mask of perfection. Buckle's death and Duncan's near drowning draw Stacey closer to Mac. The series of shocks which Stacey receives in the week before her fortieth birthday do not disintegrate her, instead they modify her nature a little. Ian starts exhibiting his love for Duncan without any jealousy and Mac is released to demonstrate the affection which his father has taught him to conceal. Transformations take place in the end of the novel; the gifts of chance or God lead Stacey towards realization and reconciliation. Eventually, in this novel time plays a redeeming role. Packer argues that it is not the critical moments or tragedies which liberate Stacey, but the knowledge that she is not alone "She is one of the many fire-dwellers, each of us strangely alone and yet all of us finally united" (129). These events provide Stacey with endurance for the survival.

At the end she reluctantly admits, "Now I see that whatever I'm like, I'm pretty well stuck with it for life. Hell of a revelation

that turned out to be" (FD 268). Stacey, in her forty, learns to accept more or less patiently that the things cannot be changed or altered. She also learns to recognize and to make use of her considerable powers. Like other characters of Laurence, she is really sustained by her strength but she is unaware of it. While others admire her strength and skill, she feels inept and feebly resourceful which is hidden in her. She can live with the reality, which she cannot fully understand or get mastery over it "I can't stand it. I cannot. I can't take it. Yeh, I can, though. By God, I can, if I set my mind to it" (FD 260). And she realizes that the necessary strength from above will be given to her if she sets her mind to it.

At the end of the novel, Stacey and Mac are able to talk freely about their personal problems and make love comfortably. As the text shows, "Then they make love after all, but gently, as though consoling one another for everything that neither of them can help nor alter" (FD 275-276). After the years of loneliness and guilt ridden frustrations, in a world in which children can be killed by automobiles or almost drowned while swimming or blasted by police bullets or burned with naplam, in which the threat of nuclear destruction seems imminent, Stacey is still able to hope and dream and is provided with the grace to go on. "Temporarily", she says as she slides into sleep, "They are all more or less okay" (FD 277). However the fires outside remain: "She feels the city receding as she slides into sleep" and asks, "Will it return tomorrow?" (FD 277).

Laurence uses 'fire' as the predominant element which is pervasive throughout the novel and plays a significant role in shaping the central character though the other elements also make a hidden presence. Fire can either create or destroy. Stacey's instable temperament in the beginning has become fuel to the fire of passion, lust and paved way for disillusioned family and marital incompatibility. But her later realization controls that fire and kindles the creative fire which rebuilds her family relationship with new understanding, imagination, love, acceptance and compassion. As Clara Thomas points out, Stacey has become "common place and ordinary, but the great achievement of her anxious, rueful, urgent voice is to reveal her extraordinary qualities of love, fortitude and, especially, vitality" (128). She changes herself to become level with

others in order to know herself first and then others. She realizes her strength to bring under control atleast the inner fires, though not the raging fire outside. Miriam Packer recognizes, "She is more than ever the Stacey who burns with energy and passion, for whom the fires of life are never extinguished" (130). Stacey wonders: "Will the fires go on, inside and out ? Until the moment when they go out for me, the end of the world" (FD 276).

Stacey in *The Fire-Dwellers* is one of Laurence's survivors, who wrestles with her society which has debunking hypocrites propogated by 'Richalife', 'Polyglam', and the ever open-eye (TV) and the violence. But finally she achieves a modest victory by accepting society on her own terms. She comes to terms with her life by recognizing herself as a survivor. Atlast, she realizes that the trap is the world and not the four walls of her house. Experiences have taught her the real lessons for her inward growth and transformation. With the realization of the other fire of love, she tries to quench the fire of passion which is leading her towards nothing but self-destruction. The fires of love opens her eyes to perceive herself and her responsibilities and to reconcile with her husband and children by showing compassion and real love which can build a real home, the 'peaceable kingdom' which she longs to achieve.

Notes

The title **The Fire - Dwellers** will henceforth be documented as **FD**.

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Patterns of Isolation in F. P. Grove

—Dr.(Mrs.) Prem Varma

Isolation and loneliness are twin themes that recur throughout Canadian literature. The causes of this are many, external as well as inherent in the characters themselves. Although isolation is common to all Grove's protagonists, to the secondary characters also, it comes out most sharply in the prairie novels. Isolation and consequently loneliness is perhaps inevitable in the vastness of the prairie landscape; even more so in pioneering times, when farms were often so far flung that there wasn't a neighbor around for miles. But the isolation reflected in Grove's work is not the result of physical factors alone. His characters are often inherently "alone," their isolation being a part of their mental make up. The climate and environment in that case only serve to enhance the latent loneliness.

In an introduction to **Fruits of the Earth** M. G. Parks suggests that Grove's novels have an implied "didactic purpose... (the) thesis of man encountering the resistance of nature and society . . ." (p. viii) by which he underlines references to loneliness and isolation in the context of the prairie landscape. Abe in **Fruits of the Earth** "had always liked the feeling of isolation produced by a blizzard," while Ruth "felt the immensity of the prairie like a menace." Ellen in **Settlers of the Marsh** tells Neils that the bush frightens her, and Lydia in **The Yoke of Life** echoes the same sentiment to Len. The hostility of the landscape is felt not by the characters alone but by Grove too. He describes it as "black, mysterious, threatening" and talks of the menace of "tornado, thunderstorm, or hail." He often

mentions the "waste" created by a blizzard. A characteristic description reads: "The landscape - the drifts, the bare trees, and even the sky - looked ice-cold, wind-swept, and hostile." (**The Yoke of Life**, p. 26). Joan Hind-Smith also shows how in **Settlers of the Marsh** "we are manipulated not only by our nature which we cannot control but by our environments which are equally unmanageable."¹

The hostility of the landscape is further brought out by Crawford, the old teacher in **The Yoke of Life**, who keeps muttering to himself how "in a pioneer district genius is left to exhaust itself in the fight against adversity!" The land being bare man is naturally exposed to sun and rain and searches "in vain for human comforts or even for human companionship."² John Elliott of **Our Daily Bread** is a perfect example of this search:

When he suddenly realized with a start that he was sitting alone, in that chilly room of the house between the hills, with not one of his children left in the district, anguish would seize him with invisible hands by the throat; and he would get to his feet and walk about as in a cage in order to conquer that feeling of loneliness, going up to the pile of bags at the south end of the room, and back to its door at its north end—that door over which, to keep out the draught, he had hung a horse blanket from the barn.

A little later Grove tells us that the "solitude scared him" and that he felt "deserted" and left alone, standing about "forlorn and lonesome."

Mary of Fruits of the Earth analyses the prairie landscape as being responsible for the "unavoidable isolation on a pioneer farm." This "unavoidable isolation" is poignantly brought out in **Settlers of the Marsh** where both Neils and Ellen are alone because each one is wrapped up in his own isolation and loneliness:

He had known, of course, that Ellen was living alone on the place; but for the first time he became aware of what that meant. Loneliness had weighed upon him at times; now it assailed him like a savage beast.

Neils feels Ellen's loneliness as she had confessed to him that after her father's death she was "the most lonesome woman in the district."

Even when the characters are not basically lonely the prairie makes them so. For instance, in **Settlers of the Marsh** we are told,

though Neils "would have liked to talk . . . the influence of the prairie snowstorm made itself felt . . . whenever one of them spoke, the wind snatched his word from his lips and threw it aloft." Subjected thus by the elements they are forced to proceed in silence.

Another feature of the prairie adding to man's essential loneliness or isolation is its vastness as it makes man feel exposed, sometimes being the only vertical intrusion in a flat or horizontal landscape. To quote Laurence Ricou, most "Canadian prairie fiction is the record of the implication of man's exposure."³ No wonder Grove's protagonists live in an "implacable prairie" where "man remains distinctly an interloper." For Grove the man who has the courage to farm on the prairie is "a giant," strong and self-reliant, full of unusual promise and high ambition. He expresses his vision in **Search of Myself** where he recalls noticing a man "ploughing straight over the crest of a hill" in the dry belt of the country where "the general verdict was unfit for farming." The sight was both startling and arresting as "he was against a tilted and spiked sunset in the western sky, he looked like a giant."

In keeping with this vision Neils too becomes strong until he begins to look upon himself "as belonging to a special race - a race not comprised in any limited nation, but one that cross-sectioned all nations: a race doomed to everlasting extinction and yet recruited out of the wastage of all other nations." To match the ambition he wants to go "to the very edge of pioneerdom" so that his enormous strength would still have meaning.

Abe, the typical successful pioneer, is also a man of epic proportions, being "extraordinarily tall, measuring six feet four . . . broad shouldered and deep-chested." Temperamentally too he is impulsive, "bearing down obstacles by sheer impetuosity." His huge figure is constantly emphasized and to the women he begins to resemble "the hero of a saga."

Though Grove's protagonists are gigantic and ambitious, towering above other men, yet they are doomed to failure. Their ambition is often both material and personal; but failure is more often on the personal level. John Elliott of **Our Daily Bread** is the best example of this. Ambitious on both fronts, he gets material

success, but "far more important to him than his dreams of economic prosperity had been his one great dream of family life." This dream is subsequently replaced by one "of seeing his children settled about their fathers." But that too he fails to realize.

Abe, like him, strives to be the first man of the district and nothing short of a mansion can satisfy him. He achieves this only to be failed by his family in the end. Neils' dream of "a house of his own" is realized but he does not get the "wife that would go through it like an inspiration." Destiny gives him the wrong wife, and the "pitter-patter of children's feet" which was a part of his vision is never realized. Len in **The Yoke of Life** dreams of success and happiness, but Lydia, who is central to all his dreams, fails him, with the result that he fails too. The Grove protagonist is therefore basically alone and isolated and fails in the personal and domestic sense even when he succeeds materially. Three of his prairie heroes do manage to plan and build, Len being the only exception, but they fail in other ways. They are either betrayed by others, or by their own natures, or by life itself. And once the hero fails, he withdraws to a position of detached observation and then the real action becomes 'internal' or 'psychological.'

Grove's protagonists are thus not isolated by external factors only but "invariably suffer within the confines of a profound personal isolation that is the result of their particular responses to the fundamental realities of their lives."⁴ Their obsession with work does make them loners, but closely allied to this is the adherence to a vision that no one else shares. In **Fruits of the Earth** Abe is possessed of an indomitable will which is necessary for the realization of his vision: "He would conquer!" He hungers for land and dreams of "a mansion dominating an extensive holding of land . . . dominating this prairie." This vision possesses him to the exclusion of wife and family. Work is such an obsession that even when Ruth is pregnant he continues to work "like a whirlwind." As Ruth becomes impatient about the house he works even more frantically, keeps working till late so that "he never sat about with Ruth any longer." "Night after night Abe came home after dark---hot, dusty, exhausted. There was no time, no energy left to devote to the household." His vision keeps expanding—he wants to build a

granary, then he wants to "buy out every no-account fellow who settles" near him, but his dream is not shared by Ruth who can neither understand nor appreciate it. Left alone he begins to strive for leadership. As the vision grows it becomes more and more dominating until it possesses Abe completely. The school and district are named after him and he is persuaded to stand for elections; but "when harvest began, he forgot about the election." He keeps away from meetings because he has no time. His only aim in life is to be "the most successful farmer of a district yet to be created," and he achieves it. It is a remarkable achievement, for "down to the nature of the windbreaks, the district bore the imprint of Abe's mind." At another point we are told: "the district defined itself into three groups, one of which was formed by Abe alone." Yet, even when he becomes a leader he remains "a slave to the soil" devoting all his energy to the farm.

Neils of *Search of Myself* is as much a visionary as Abe, and in his case too the vision is equally obsessive. He works like someone being lashed by unseen forces. The vision that possesses him centers round Ellen:

... when I filed on that homestead, I did so because it was near you. When I fenced it, I drove your name into the ground as the future owner with every post. When I cleared my field, I did it for you. When I dug the cellar of the house, I laid it out so it would save you work. When I planned the kitchen and dining room, I thought of nothing but saving your steps. When I bought the lumber, I felt I was taking home presents for you. Whenever I came driving over the Marsh, I saw you standing at the gate to welcome me. When I laid out the garden, I thought of you bringing in the greens.

John Elliott of *Our Daily Bread* is also a dreamer. Having achieved his dream of material prosperity and a family life, he now wants his children to carry on his dreams and convert them into reality. He always lived a life of dreams, ideas, and introspection, and when reality fails to conform to these he feels disappointed and frustrated. But he, unlike Abe, becomes progressively more lonely and isolated as the novel proceeds. Both Abe and Neils are able to overcome their isolation towards the end but not John Elliott. On the contrary, it becomes more pronounced because he persists "to the

end in search of his dream, even when the dream lies buried in the prairie dust."⁵

Len in **The Yoke of Life** is like him in that he too cannot give up his dream. His ideal is "to master all human knowledge." Like Neils he feels he is destined for higher things and refuses to be defeated. Later he becomes reconciled to the idea of not being able to acquire all human knowledge, but cannot be reconciled to the idea of a Lydia who has committed lapses and fallen from the ideal. Unable to forgive he pronounces the verdict: "We cannot live together; but we can die."

This adherence to an incomprehensible vision produces a two-way isolation. It isolates the dreamer as well as his family and friends. Abe's isolation isolates Ruth. She loses all incentive. "For whom should I doll myself up?" she asks, feeling alone and desolate. She stops visiting people and they in turn stop visiting her. Abe's isolation makes strangers of his children also. He becomes aloof not only from family and friends but neighbors also. This aloofness breeds antagonism with the result that though Abe was admired by many he is hated by some. This antagonism reaches its high water mark when he is not allowed to vote.

Idealists and visionaries, for such are the majority of Grove's protagonists, are not easily accepted. John Elliott succeeds in creating the same feeling of antagonism in his children that Abe creates in his neighbors. When Elliott writes to Ormond asking him to come and take him to his children it is they who vote against his coming. He comes to the painful realization that all his children want to leave him immediately after Martha's death. Even before she is dead his "presence in the house resembled henceforth that of a barely tolerated stranger." He would find the table laid for him alone and often felt as though he had "become like a passenger on board ship." Because he had been dominating once his children still fear him and feel dominated by him. The result is so much antagonism that he cannot stay. Elliott's discovery that the children are not a continuation of himself: "In each of them a third thing had appeared, their individual being," is another reason for his isolation.

Both Abe and Elliott are isolated because their families fail them. They achieve economic and material prosperity but their

children never succeed them. It is thus a vicious cycle: the isolation of the protagonist sets in motion the isolation of the other characters, which in turn emphasizes the initial isolation. In **Search of Myself** too Ellen and Neils mutually isolate one another. When he marries Clara, Neils isolates her also. Clara and Ellen become loners in much the same way as Neils is a loner. So too are Len and Lydia in **The Yoke of Life**.

Another factor basic to the pattern of isolation is the inherent sense of loneliness that possesses the central characters. When Mrs. Elliott lies dying her husband walks about the house, restless and disturbed, because "between him and his wife stood a barrier." He is not aware of all that goes on in the house; the children are not openly defiant but subtly so, and it doesn't take him long to discover that "his wish and will counted for little." The isolation that wraps him is set off even before Martha's death. And once dead, the family disintegrates, and no one wants to look after him or stay on.

John Elliott becomes more and more diminutive as he becomes more and more isolated. Even though he attempts to overcome this isolation and visits his children he remains essentially lonely. In **Our Daily Bread** Elliott is not the only character suffering from loneliness. Henrietta, his vampire like daughter, succeeds in alienating both father and husband. Pete, who courted her for twelve years, finds that the spells of happiness for him are few and short-lived, and he remains essentially a lonely man.

This sense of isolation comes through in **Search of Myself** in an equally pronounced manner. Ellen is lonesome and though she can remedy that by a marriage chooses not to. Her adherence to a vow made to her dying mother enhances Neils' sense of loneliness, for he finds life incomplete without her. Simple and naïve he proposes marriage to Clara on moral grounds after being seduced by her. Once married to him Clara becomes as lonely as him. He was never a 'mixer,' but his attitude of cold indifference at the beginning and positive hostility towards the end make Clara almost desperate in her isolation.

Abe of **Fruits of the Earth** is also basically a lonely being. He conquers the spirit of the prairie but loses his wife and children: Jim

is expelled from the school and Frances lands herself into trouble. But Abe, unlike other prairie heroes, can bend and accept imperfections. As long as he remains the idealist he is a loner, but once he can accept the frailties and fallibilities he becomes more human and less isolated. Neils and Ellen too in **Search of Myself** are able to effect a compromise because they lower or abandon their ideals. Because Len of **The Yoke of Life** cannot accept imperfection his story ends tragically. John Elliott in **Our Daily Bread** tries to compromise but his nature betrays him and tragedy results.

The "profound personal isolation" is often enhanced by another major factor-tension in marriage. It may or may not be accompanied by sexual maladjustment or incompatibility. Neils and Clara afford a striking example of marital isolation. The marriage, based on moral grounds, becomes too big a price to pay, for having expressed a biological urge. The infatuation dies soon enough: "It had not taken above three days before he knew that, if ever there had been in him the true fire that welds two lives together, it had died down." As time passes Neils realizes more and more "that the woman who had become his wife was a stranger to him." He asks for no confidences and receives none. He makes no demands on Clara. When she suggests changes on the plea that she is not the kind of woman who works, he accepts them. Things begin to drift and the only thing that holds the marriage together is sex—for Clara's smile still has the power of disarming Neils. It is however not before long that frustration sets in there too. When he discovers that her hair is dyed he wonders if the color of her face is not also artificial. One morning he is totally disillusioned: "From behind the mask which still half concealed her face, another face looked out at him, like a death's head: the coarse, aged face of a coarse, aged woman." He was filled with aversion and disgust, and after that they simply lived side by side but nothing bound them to each other. Isolation then begins to grow around them like a cocoon. It is enhanced day by day. Though living in the same house, they arrive at a stage when Neils is aware of her presence only by the disappearance of an egg or the lessening of water. This kind of utter isolation is of course rare and may not be found in the other novels.

Neils' marriage to Clara brings about another kind of isolation also. When Clara is presented to Bobby as Mrs. Lindstedt Bobby

blushes. What puzzles Neils is that no one speaks to him about his marriage; no one congratulates him; and no one comes to call on them. This social ostracism leads to social isolation. Though there are neighbors, Neils becomes an island unto himself. In his social isolation he is bracketed with Clara but because of his marital isolation he becomes lonelier than ever before.

A similar though less exaggerated pattern of isolation is found in Abe's and Ruth's married life too. They drift apart but not to the extent of Clara and Neils. Besides, there are children, who become a sort of cementing factor. As a matter of fact it is Frances' predicament that brings them together again. Fundamentally however it is because they are different characters. Their tensions result in moments of isolation and loneliness but they are temporary, and are perhaps mainly the result of the fact that successful pioneers are "incompatible with that tender devotion which alone can turn the relation of the sexes into a thing of beauty."⁶ Both Abe and Ruth realize their mistake and want to make up; and they can because they have not drifted so far apart that their love has turned into hatred as in the case of Neils and Clara.

Martha and John Elliott senior also experience a sense of marital isolation towards the end of their lives in **Our Daily Bread**. When Martha is sick, her husband, we are told,

was almost invariably informed that it would be better not to disturb her. He suffered greatly under this exclusion. Once he was asked to read her the Sermon on the Mount. But he had read no more than ten or twelve lines before a movement of the patient's hand told him to stop; he was waved away.

The pattern of isolation in this novel is traced out in the lives of the children too. No sooner are they paired off then a process of alienation sets in. Cathleen alone of all the children appears happily married. Henrietta and Pete stand at the other end of the spectrum. In them we have an example almost as extreme as Neils and Clara. They do not even live together towards the end. But it is Pete alone who is wrapped in isolation as Henrietta has the children. Even Pete's isolation is not as complete as Neils as he has friends and a social life. The same pattern of marital isolation is repeated on a lesser scale in Mr. and Mrs. Lund and Mr. and Mrs. Amundsen in

Settlers of the Marsh; in Gladys and Frank, Isabel and Kenneth, Norman and Dorothy, and John and Lillian in **Our Daily Bread**. Even Mary and Fred who have been married for ten years, have lived side by side, have shared board, but have never known what the other did. Cathleen *appears* happy, I said, because she too suffers from a secret sense of isolation. She complains: "Because we live differently, my own people treat me as if we were lepers!" And when her father is leaving, despite Woodrow's and Arthur's presence, she looks forlorn and lost. Len and Lydia in **The Yoke of Life** experience similar feelings even though they never get married. Towards the end they start feeling that they have become strangers to one another.

Isolation can also be the result of conflict. This conflict in turn can be either a conflict with external elements, or with fellow men, or with one's self. The conflict that occurs most frequently in Grove is the conflict of wills which often takes the shape of a conflict between the generations. All these various kinds of conflicts give rise to some sort of feeling of being isolated and alone. The conflict between generations and its subsequent engulfing loneliness is the key theme of **Our Daily Bread**. John Elliott, who has been an autocrat all his life, still wishes to guide and rule his children but realizes his being unwanted and dares not interfere. It is shocking for him that his sons leave for town or for farm without consulting him, that they "make momentous changes on short notice and without proper deliberation." This leads him to realize that "between the older and the younger generations there lay an abyss." The question that keeps assailing him is: why is he alone? He cannot accept that all his children have grown away from him and do not want to be disturbed by a critical old man.

In **Fruits of the Earth** this clash of generations is brought out towards the end. While **Our Daily Bread** begins at the point where the family begins to disintegrate and scatter, **Fruits of the Earth** ends when the disintegration sets in. The sense of isolation subsequent to this conflict does not appear in the novel to a great degree. The conflict between generations takes on the form of a conflict between different sets of values. The urban values of the post-war years and Abe's inability to be reconciled to them become

factors of isolation. When Abe lies awake "puzzling over his relation to the children" he realizes that

While they were little, he had been preoccupied with the farm; while they were adolescent, he had been immersed in public business. Why should he think about these things now when it was painful to do so? Why indeed, except because he had withdrawn from that material world in which alone he had felt at home? They were preparing to depart and to enter that world which he had left. At best could he hope to meet them at a crossroads to catch a glimpse of them as they vanished along paths of their own.

Abe's isolation is brought home to him sharply: "All about him a life was lived of which he knew nothing." John Elliott of **Our Daily Bread** feels the same way—they both become spectators in their own homes.

Conflict within the self is another cause of isolation. Neils is perhaps the best example of this conflict. His reason and better sense make him feel ashamed of the baser instincts that had prompted his marriage to Clara. Before he marries her he is torn between the desire to possess Ellen and the seductive alluring of Clara. Alone with his vision and his temptation he suffers in isolation, and that is, in a way, the reason for his blunder. Had he not been a loner he would have known about Clara and not felt morally bound to marry her.

This conflict within the self is operative in John Elliott too to a certain extent. Len too suffers from an internal conflict because he finds it difficult to reconcile brash reality with his idealism, coupled with a simplicity and naiveté that matches Neils'. That also explains his constant need for solitude and introspection.

Other factors contributing to a character's isolation are pride and lack of communication. Often, though not always, pride can be the cause of a lack of communication. This lack of communication is brought out very effectively in **Our Daily Bread** when children forget to inform their parents of such important things like getting married or having a baby or starting a career. The news of Norman's marriage is mentioned very casually by Gladys who presumes her father must have known. Margaret's being an instructor at the university is conveyed in the same casual manner. Henrietta does not inform her father of the birth of her daughter.

The same lack of communication exists between Abe and his children too. Mentally Abe cannot communicate. He does not inform his sister of his marriage to Ruth. When Charles dies he is unable to share his grief. When he learns of Frances' pregnancy he wants to be alone though he appreciates Ruth's efforts at lessening the blow for him. It is rather late in life that he realizes that he has paid a very heavy price for his vision and zeal.

A similar communication gap is also found in **The Yoke of Life**. Len cannot tell Mr. Crawford that he fought in the school only to defend his good name. Even his visions and aspirations he keeps to himself and does not try to tell his step-father about the opportunity that he craves. Neils too lacks this sense of communication. It is basically that destroys the relationship between him and Clara. Neither can he communicate with Ellen and tell her that he loves her and cares for her.

Pride is often regarded as the cause of John Elliott's isolation, but that is only partially true. He is proud no doubt but every incident seems to have been planned to humble him. At the end his pride has been overcome, but not his isolation. On the contrary it has been further intensified. Abe's isolation however does diminish in accordance with his pride. Pride, in Grove's novels is often the result of intellectual superiority, and the two always go hand in hand. While Abe despises "the intellectual powers of most of the crowd;" Margaret and Cathleen in **Our Daily Bread** are aloof because they are the only two educated daughters in the family. When they come home for a wedding there is no sense of participation; they merely "looked on, critical and reserved."

These then are the main patterns of isolation found in Grove. Generalization is however difficult as each character is an individual and the product of the inter-action of many factors. For instance, Neils isolation is primarily the result of sexual confrontation; John Elliott's the result of the disintegration of the family; Abe's of the visionary; and Len's a combination of the visionary and the sexual. Common to all these protagonists is what Jones calls the "will-to-power,"⁷ that, he says, is a favourite theme with Grove. This will-to-power and its ultimate futility is not only his favorite theme but also the common cause of the isolation from which his heroes suffer.

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10

Atwood's Abysmal World and its Vanished Visionary Gleam (An Ecocritical Investigation of Margaret Atwood's Futuristic Novels)

—Mrs. Suka Joshua

There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream. (Intimations Ode)

Wordsworth could recall the uncanny power and splendor of nature which was impressed with 'dreamlike vividness' in his young mind. But today could the 'family romance' with the natural world that Wordsworth enjoyed bear any meaning for the young minds? Like Jimmy-Snowman and Glenn-Crake of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* most of our young people can only think and talk about wild computer games and struggles and strives that have torn the land apart. Hardly can they visualize the 'visionary gleam' and hardly can even writers eulogize nature but except with a deep concern and

anxiety. Eco-concerned writers often give disturbing descriptions of nature and its decline, intended to impugn both our ignorance and our developmental greed. Moreover, the break neck pace of cultural, ecological and economic changes in the world provide creative fodder for the new literary voices and such writers leave ample scope for their writings to be viewed ecocritically. As a result, environmental literature and ecocriticism which were nonexistent three decades ago, have now become immensely popular in the literary world.

The word 'ecocriticism' traces back to William Rueckert's 1978 "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" and then it lay dormant in critical vocabulary until Cheryll Glotfetley revived the term in 1989. The credit for the rich usage of the term goes to Glotfetley and now we find the term appearing frequently in calls for papers and critical articles. This interdisciplinary field that has emerged in literary and cultural studies "analyzes the role that the natural environment plays in the imagination of a cultural community at a specific historical moment, examining how the concept of 'nature' is defined, what values are assigned to it or denied it and why, and the way in which the relationship between human and nature is envisioned" (Ursula K. Heise). It shares the view that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Cheryll Glotfelty, who resurrected ecocriticism, himself defines it as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It is "fundamentally an ethical criticism and pedagogy, one that investigates and helps make possible the connections among self, society, nature and text" comments Christopher Cokinos. Almost all the definitions highlight ecocriticism's interconnections between nature, culture and human beings and Atwood's novels do conform to these definitions, thus lending themselves to ecocritical investigations.

In an age of environmental crisis, Atwood takes her writing as a mission to do some good, to ameliorate the crisis. In her works Atwood has performed the function of the artist to speak the forbidden, to speak out especially in a time when progress and development are the jarring jingles of Multi-national Companies that are swallowing up the earth and its resources. The relationship between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of

commitment to environmental crisis is obvious in Atwood's novels. Images of nature and aspects of the natural environment as well as the disasters inflicted upon women and the natural environment have been Atwood's topics. With great dexterity she weaves together image patterns and themes that draw spontaneous ecocritical attention.

In the novels *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*, the novels that I have chosen for ecocritical examination, one can sense Atwood's prominent concerns about the already abysmal world and her ecological commitment that is fed by a strong biocentric understanding of how people's survival links into the future of the planet at large. She narrates drastic stories of disaster, of reproductive risks and dangers to public health initiated and encouraged by corporate globalism. Since the novels cover a span of thirty years, having been written between 1970 to 2003, it is clear that these are longtime concerns of hers.

The unnamed narrator of *Surfacing*, published in 1970, has been living in the city, an unnatural construct of concrete and steel, a symbol of rigidity and control. When the novel opens, she has already abandoned the city and is prepared for the changes to come. The familiar road and the home ground have all undergone great changes. The Americans have crossed the border, invaded the Canadian landscape, littered and spread disease, greed, violence and destruction. She feels their rejection of nature and the strong presence of American machinations. She could smell missiles, war and death everywhere. The very beginning of the novel laden with irony prepares us for further ironic details about the infested city. Astounded by the change she utters, "I can't believe I'm on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south, and I notice they now have seaplanes for hire" (*Surfacing* 3). Her victimized spirit identifies itself with the lifeless logged woods, the hanged heron and the frog used as bait in fishing. Even the trees, the signs of life, have fallen victims to the encroaching disease. The combined colonial experience of patriarchy, cultural imperialism and geographical colonization has left her with feelings of displacement and disconnectedness.

The tension between Toronto and the narrator's childhood home, the green world of wilderness and the gray world of the city, the urban and the rural animate the novel *Surfacing*. The society and the natural world cannot coexist. The characters rely on modern conveniences, see themselves as superior to nature and fail to take the lessons that nature offers. The urban South (US), invaded and endangered the natural world of trees, animals and lakes and threatened the Canadian culture. The neglected North (Canada) is now full of mosquitoes, weeds and tourists who hunt and fish and leave their garbage behind. The narrator longs for the past and her quest for identity raises questions of gender and environmentalism that the novel explores in complex and ambiguous ways. The surfacer realizes a desperate need to regain and reclaim identity and an interaction with nature is imperative for her. The relationship between people and landscape thus resonate throughout this novel.

It is explicit in *Surfacing* that Atwood's complaint is not against technology but against its abuse, its employment in the services of war and repression. She expresses her anxiety about the uses of large scale industrial technology which leads to alienation, de-humanization and domination. Her stern warning is that the spectacular speed of technological development will leave a far more terrifying impact on people, land and its resources. As Jenna Wilson cogently comments, "Strong and unmistakable in *Surfacing*, the ecofeminist theory establishes itself in three specific ways, through the references to patriarchal reasoned dualities between the masculine and feminine world; through the domination and oppression of the feminine and natural world and through the surfacer's own internal struggle and re-embrace of nature"(Ecofeminism).

While *Surfacing* is a somber novel that pictures an ominous world, *The Handmaid's Tale* is often hilarious with Atwood's strong satire and dark and bitter jokes pervading the plot. Yet as Wilson observes in *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics*, "Resembling, *Surfacing* however, the book endorsed respect for humanity and nature..."(290). This dystopian novel attempts to imagine the kind of values that might evolve if environmental pollution rendered most of the human race sterile. Once again the

note of warning – that every aspect of environmental degradation and destruction and abuse of nature will translate itself into a serious menace to the life of future generation – is loud and clear in this novel. Atwood seems to affirm Vandana Shiva's statement that "In the late twentieth century it is becoming clear that our scientific systems are totally inadequate to counteract or eliminate the hazards.... Each disaster seems like an experiment ... to teach us more about the effects of deadly substances that are brought into daily production and use" (Mies 82).

In the Republic of Gilead where this novel is set, due to nuclear accidents, repeated use of pesticides and leakages from chemical weapons most men have become sterile and women barren. The few fertile women are taken to be handmaidens or birthmothers for the upper class, to supply the barren wives of commanders with children. But the ecological disorder has also led to birth of 'unbabies' (deformed babies). The role of women, like Offred the protagonist, was reduced to bearing children. While fertile women were thus subjugated, unfertile women were sent to 'the colonies' to clear toxic waste, where they are sure to die either of disease or of radiation. Offred craves for a world of love and beauty and her desperate words,

I wish this story were different. I wish it were more civilized. I wish it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia. I wish it had more shape. I wish it were about love, or about sudden realizations important to one's life, or even about sunsets, birds, rainstorms, or snow. (343)

Resound with her longing for a serene air, may be for the years she spent with her husband and her daughter, when she had a job and money of own and also had access to knowledge. Now Gilead has taken away everything from her. In an age of machines man has also become mechanized and utterly devoid of emotions – with neither love for humans nor for nature.

Atwood has incorporated ecological disaster into the plot to warn mankind that "No one can save herself or himself individually; it is an illusion to think that 'I alone' can save my skin ... What modern machine-man does to the earth will eventually be felt by all; everything is connected. 'Unlimited Progress' is a dangerous myth

because it suggests that we can rape and destroy living nature, of which we are an integral part, without ourselves suffering the effects" (Mies 93).

The cataclysmic harm inflicted by the swirling sweep of scientific advancement leads to sterility and barrenness and it was to compensate the dangerously declining birthrate that Gilead started recruiting women to repopulate the country. So, we can conclude that the ultra military regime and an extremely rigid totalitarian state and the dangers of theocracy were all activated by an irreparable imbalance in the ecosystem. This novel gives a wake up call and alerts us that misuse and abuse of nature and technology militates against a genuinely good quality of life. The abysmal world that Atwood paints makes us cognizant of the fact that we cannot have excessive chemical products or toxic fast foods without risking clean air and good health. But "Too clearly in this book in which everything has happened or is happening somewhere around the world, the future once again fails to learn from the past, ..." (*Margaret Atwood's Fairy Tale Sexual Politics* 292). This cautionary futuristic novel reveals Atwood's ability to peer behind the curtains into some of the darkest and disturbing truths about environmental hazards that pose a perilous threat to the world. Yet this novel is not without hope and as Wilson remarks, "If we cultivated our Mother's garden, the book implies possibility of rebirth: not a return to Eden or matriarchy, but harmony among animal, mineral, and vegetable worlds and peace within the human one" (294). *The Handmaid's Tale* is both a challenge and an education which brings a deep realization that our own actions are not without consequences for the environment.

Most of Atwood's novels like *The Handmaid's Tale* read like ecological treatises and form perfect ground for the study of the interconnectedness between nature and culture and of the negotiation between the human and the non-human. Atwood has so deeply been affected by the horrifying outcome of the capital intensive industrialism, exhaustion of the basic energy resources, general vulnerability of the non-industrial world and the deep deterioration in the living conditions of the people that there is hardly a novel that does not reflect upon nature and the nurture it

needs and her crisply critical *Oryx and Crake* is a culmination of her concerns.

In her latest dystopian novel, *Oryx and Crake* Atwood expresses her concern over the widening inequality, growing hunger and poverty, distortion of the resources of the developing and underdeveloped nations and the vast environmental degradation caused by corporate globalism. In particular she voices her concern over the dangers posed by the 'gene rush' and the impacts of biotechnology as they ruthlessly upset the ecosystem. This novel engages in an intense argument about the future of modern society and gives stunning expression to the author's view that the misuse of science and technology and man's arrogant intelligence have only found newer ways to enslave and finally end humanity. As the novel *Oryx and Crake* opens, we see Snowman (once known as Jimmy), the only survivor of the biological disaster, enduring his killing loneliness. His only companions are a group of Crakers – not normal humans but genetically engineered lab products. The pathetic cry of Snowman "Now I'm alone... All alone. Alone on a wide, wide sea" (*Oryx and Crake* 3) mixes with the stink of the air, horrifying the readers. To add to the horror is the presence of multitudinous wild pigoons and wolvogs, genetically engineered animals of Atwood's imagination. Jimmy's friend Crake (once known as Glenn) and his paramour Oryx, the other significant characters actively participate in the RejoovenEsense Compound's projects. Crake makes use of his intelligence to produce the youth-prolonging BlyssPluss Pill and the bioengineered humans. The aim of this pill as Crake explains to Jimmy is to protect people from sexually transmitted diseases, from frustration and low self-esteem and to prolong youth. But a hostile bioform, a killer virus has been added to this pill which will create new diseases and make people sexually sterile. Crake's top secret genetic experiment fails when the killer virus in the pill breaks out bringing a massive disaster on humanity.

Though *Oryx and Crake* reads like a fanciful fable, it leaves us with the conviction that the value of human life is fast deteriorating. The purpose of Crake's Paradise Project is to create totally chosen babies that would incorporate any physical, mental or spiritual feature, the buyer might wish to select. Crake's grandmaster

plan of bioterrorism and the genetic experiment to replace the 'flawed humanity' with his genetically modified hominids, the Crakers, points to the degradation of human life and human worth. The present-day cloning and test-tube babies and the numerous articles in *New Scientists.com*, for example, bear witness that we need not wait for a far future for babies to be mass produced. With deep human concern Atwood portrays the plight of men betrayed into servitude and destruction by their own greed. In *Crake* we could see the God like capacity given to hardcore scientists by the power of modern technology that is going to bring more chaos. The warning wave sent through this novel is that the Utopian hopes and aspirations will crash down soon. Atwood makes us see the moral flaw at the center of a society which has mistaken comfort for civilization.

The contemporary culture of science has not only robbed the earth of its riches but also robbed human beings of their emotions. People are left with no moral or cultural values. They have been supplanted by the allure of power, sex and violence. "Pair-bonding" is the term the bright spark Crake gives to relationship between a boy and a girl. See Atwood's cynical tone in the following conversation between Crake and Jimmy: "Pair-bonding at this stage is not encouraged" said Crake, sounding like a guidebook. "We are supposed to be focusing on our work" (207) Remember, it is this workaholic- Crake who produced the killer Blysspluss Pill, shed innocent blood, murdered Oryx in a matter of face fashion and brought doom on all the humanity. May be he believed 'Ending is better than mending'? When his Paradise Project ended in utter destruction, Snowman was left alone to face the world of scorching heat, scarce food and strange animals like pigoons and wolvogs. Along with Snowman we start traveling into the horrifying hell Atwood creates with her scathing description. Here is the sample of the horrid picture of Snowman's world. "Noon is the worst, with its glare and humidity. At about eleven o'clock Snowman retreats back into the forest, out of sight of the sun altogether, because the evil rays bounce off the water and get at him even if he's protected from the sky, and then he reddens and blisters" (39). The effect of global warming is soon going to bring us such similar horrors of heat, which some parts of the world are already experiencing. The US

Environmental Protection Agency's article on 'Global Warming' gives us a grim warning: "Global warming may also increase the risk of some infectious diseases ... Diseases that are spread by mosquitoes and other insects could become more prevalent if warmer temperature enabled those insects to become established farther north; such "vector-borne" diseases include malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever and encephaliti". The chilling story of *Oryx and Crake* and the alarming science fiction world it creates are not unfamiliar paths for the present generation.

Technology has also created a great chasm between the rich and the poor as we see in *Oryx and Crake*. The elite live in the heavily guarded hygienic compounds, that resemble the old nineteenth century company towns, while the poor live in untidy and unhygienic pleeblands. Atwood's question seems to be what good is science and technology if it can't bridge the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor. Read Atwood's anxious words:

"Writers write about what worries them, and the world of *Oryx and Crake* is what worries me right now. It's not a question of inventions – all human inventions are merely tools – but of what might be done with them; for no matter how high the tech, homo Sapiens - Sapiens remains at heart what he's been for tens of thousands of years – the same emotions, the same preoccupations," (Writing *Oryx and Crake*).

The fear and concern of Atwood has been further confirmed by the former President Jimmy Carter's words. In an exclusive *Encyclopedia Britannica* Interview with Jimmy Carter, to the question "How would you characterize the state of the world in 2003?" he has answered thus:

"I think the world is deeply concerned and uncertain about the future.... For the first time in human history, there is one undisputed superpower that is asserting its military strength, ostentatiously.... The greatest challenge the world faces in the new millennium is 'growing gap between rich and poor people'", (Environment).

With all the bleak pictures she skillfully paints in *Oryx and Crake* Atwood cautions this crazy world about the possible catastrophic end of humanity in the near future if it is not willing to mend its ways. She makes an impassioned plea to the world to

derive strength from the prophetic warning the novels project, to have a firm code of conduct and reject false happiness and amoral pleasures science would create and to stop technology from robbing nature and humanity. Our realization of the trauma the world is going to face thus intensified, we need to ponder over the questions Atwood herself places before us “What if we continue down the road we’re already on? How slippery is the slope? What are our saving graces? Who’s got the will to stop us?” (Writing).

Atwood in telling the stories of her protagonists combines social observations with her scientific commentary and sets them against the larger global changes she describes. “She also uses her narrative as a platform to voice her concern about a trend in contemporary culture that she finds troubling: the mainstreaming of violence and pornography into the mass culture” (Bouson) Atwood’s apparent belief is that “Everything is connected to everything else and that literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system in which energy, matter and ideas interact” (Science & Ecocriticism) and this makes her passion and concern for nature natural and genuine and makes her novels read like ecological treatises. The vivid images of the world, a world void of the visionary gleam and torn by the ripple effects of destruction unleashed by the operations of technology, attest to Atwood’s anguish and her longing for a world ‘appareled in celestial light’. Her words, “Writing, no matter what its subject, is an act of faith; the primary faith being that someone out there will read the results. I believe it’s also an act of hope, the hope that things can be better than they are” (*Second Words* 349) expresses her optimism that there is still hope for this strife torn world to come back to health. Atwood’s firm belief and her powerful language expressing her passion for this planet thus qualify her novels for resourceful ecocritical research.

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11

Conflict and Compromise in Atwood's *Surfacing*

—Dr.(Mrs.) P.R. Aruna Devi

Atwood's **Surfacing** is an exhibition of the inner conflicts of a Canadian woman who falls a prey to the power politics of gender in a patriarchal society and to the impact of neo – colonialism of her land. The nameless protagonist suffers from humiliation and feels the crude display of power by male over the female analogous to the power wielded over the land by the colonizers. She moves to her home place where she has grown up to look back to her roots and the past for she realizes roots alone can validate and legitimate her true identity. A discussion on major features of post-colonial literatures projects the concept of place and displacement. "It is here that the special post – colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between the self and place."¹ The protagonist therefore undertakes a journey to her native with her friends under the pretext of searching her lost father.

Her present identity as a victim, a colonized, powerless subject makes her ruminative over her past and the intuition guides her to take the help of the past to understand the present status which in turn would be indispensable in shaping her future. The words of Andrienne Rich while writing about Feminine Reading and Criticism seem to fit in well here.

A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine

ourselves, how our language has trapped us as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative and how we begin to see and name – and therefore live – afresh.²

As has been quoted the protagonist prefers to remain nameless, tries to rebel against male domination and wishes to look back to relive her life.

Revisiting her native though an external journey provides her with an opportunity to speculate on her past life through a parallel inward journey. Right from childhood her growth has been hampered by men. Her art master instead of inspiring her independent creativity has instilled fear and reluctance that made her dependent and destroyed her creative energy and imaginative force. He made her compromise her professional skill for male ego. Her artistic talent had been cruelly nipped in the bud which had made an indelible scar, though the pain of the wound had subsided long ago under the healing touch of time.

Still damaging was another incident. Before she could enjoy the dignity of motherhood and take pride in the creative power of a woman the object of honour that could have made her relish the nectar of feminine fertility, implanted in her womb was destroyed. The abortion was a fatal blow that made her head droop down in shame of her powerlessness. Creation is a privilege given as a boon to women. But men had learnt to rescind this resource of women for his own comfort and convenience. The protagonist feels that contraception and abortion are the inventions of male hegemony. Not only was she made barren but also crucified to carry the sin of being a killer of her own child before it could see the light of the world.

Her friendship with Anna and David introduces her to yet another issue of contention resulting out of male domination. In the course of the journey her close contact with Anna makes her observe the make-up she puts on always. To her shock Anna reveals that fact that she is forced to do so by her husband.

“He’s got this little set of rules. If I break one of them I get punished,” says Anna (*Surfacing*, pp. 140-141). She now realizes how a seemingly pleasant marital relationship brings havoc to the

true 'self' of women. The image projected through such artificialities are deceptive of true identification. With pain and shame she again looks at the helplessness of Anna when she gives nude poses for photography. The dignity and divinity of marriage can no longer be valued. The manipulation of male power plays a vital role in puncturing feminine identity in all aspects. Her conflict gets intensified and the rebellious instinct in her makes her usurp the film and throw it in a lake that symbolizes the submersion of women's subjugation. The distorted figure of women gives her the urge to crush the male imperialism. When she comes to know that her lover Joe is also a part of this conspiracy she instantly renounces him.

Being sensitized to the issues of exploitation, domination, interference and seduction she now possesses extra power to sense and see the ravages wrought on her native land by the colonizer. Brooding on the binaries male/female, colonizer/colonized she feels a strong bond between her and her land. As "the history of patriarchy presents a variety of cruelties and barbarities"³ on women, the history of colonialism violates the sanctity and freshness of the wilderness of her Canada. Women's body and violence by men on women's body is compared to the victimized locations. Just as men spread over women, the lands are reshaped and reconstructed according to the needs of the imperialistic colonizer. The country's resources are squandered as women's creative force is dummed by men. The charm and natural splendour are lost in the refiguring process. Men violates the body of women as though the body and the soul belong to them the moment the women yield under pressure. They know ways to mend the damage caused also but the ramifications of the destruction zoom to enormity that completely destabilizes the equilibrium of women. Similarly a colossal damage is done to her land. "Gray, Cohen and Atwood appropriate the allegorical representation of the female body from the empire to expose the colonial process as rape of the body or territory for the economic and sexual satisfaction of the imperial power."⁴ Atwood thus makes her protagonist boil at the savage imperialism over Canada. The US invasion steals the natural beauty of the locations by infiltrating into the fresh rivers, lakes, deep jungles and vegetated lands. She condemns the fresh catch and tourist's movements of the

Americans. The construction of the tourist cabins and entertainments make her gape not in wonder but out of fear and disgust. The trees are axed, birds are killed and resources of the land are plundered as though they own them while the owners shrink in shame and shiver in fear.

Birds which are to be considered as symbols of peace and freedom stand for doom and submission. Killed with a bullet and hanged by a nylon rope the dead heron speaks of violence and the upsurge of unwanted technology. Burial is a ritual that indicates the last honour showered upon the dead. Since the dead bird is not buried but hanged, it is as though the dead is being dishonoured. It is a symbol of disgrace inflicted on the nature by the looters.

The power of the language also prints its marks on the mind of the protagonist. She feels empowerment comes to a person through verbal communication. But being a victim of double colonization she often fails to convey her feelings which is felt as a weakness. But she knows her inability to articulate started from the time when her artistic nuances were suppressed by her art master. She has undergone the trauma of alienation and solitude. Communication is an expression of power and language is the forceful tool. If any living being is deprived of this power madness sets in and this happens to her. The status of women as a subaltern as pointed out by Gayatri Spivak is noteworthy here. Focusing on female subaltern, the doubly marginalized she feels, "If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow."⁵ The protagonist recalls the dry relationship that existed between neighbours, her mother and Mrs. Paul because of the language problem. Though living in the same place they couldn't converse with each other and language becomes a barrier for a good friendship. A conscious inability planted in the minds of the natives is also considered to be a damage to the self esteem and renders a complex that results in easy submission. Though attained independence from the imperialistic governance, the country and the people still experience the influence of the ex-colonial power and it is to be noted that at this point of time, it is not the early colonial states that is thought of, but of a new colonizer with added

dimension of super power that holds an upper hand in establishing a global domination based on economy and technology.

Her vision of the dead body of her father floating on water depicts the mental agony and the manifestation of confusion. Though immersed in the water of destruction again and again as the emergence of the body the women come to the surface to survive. The instinct to survive instigates her to self question herself. Who is the real cause of oppression? Is the oppressor alone to be blamed? She gets an answer to come to a compromise. Atwood's concept of the "Colonial Victim" and the "Imperial Victor" is exhibited in *Survival*, a thematic guide to the Canadian Literature. She talks of four important victim positions – the denial to accept oneself as a victim, generalized victim, righteous anger and creative non victim. To deny the position of the victim, one has to condemn himself / herself being a victim, and direct the anger to the "real source of oppression" instead of blaming the victor. If this process is executed with a calculated move towards the detection and removing of the causes of oppression and channeling the energy towards construction, the position gets altered.

Though at the surface level the anger is directed towards the neo – colonizers, the USA and the Britain, the real anger is pointed towards the Canadians who allowed themselves to be repressed. Now the search is complete and the conflicts are over. The protagonist realizes the real formula to relive her life. Acceptance and appropriation instead of renouncement and rejection are the components of the configuration of real identity. From fear, complex and guilt she slowly steps out to a congenial world to mend her ways to tread the pathway of life.

Renouncement of her lover Joe is reconsidered and she allows him to give her the seed of life. Reconstruction starts and she moves closer to nature. "Many forms of American radical feminism also romantically asserts that women are closer to nature, to the environment, to a matriarchal principle at once biological and ecological."⁶ Proving this theory true the protagonist tends to reject artificiality in all possible ways by eating only natural food, living in solitude and refusing to speak. She now wantonly alienates herself not as a victim but as a victor, a creator. She has realized that she

cannot reject anything because life within her demands all that go to make it a full – fledged free living being in the world. She is afraid to reject now as she feels "If I starve it starves with me" (*Surfacing* p. 222). Once the conflicts and uncertainties have made her powerless and speechless, but now the compromise and acceptance have made her voiced and powerful. She has learnt to embrace what all has been disowned once. Her motto is to reclaim what she has lost, redefine her identity and redesign her past to lead a complete faultless life. Power and gender have different connotations now that leads to survival.

Atwood's victim theory has leashed fresh attitude in the feminist perspective towards life. Wherever there are conflicts and agony, compromises need to be arrived at to reshape life. Like the wilderness and abundance of Canada, the protagonist with her prudent decision made herself fertile and life within her will lead her to a fruitful future.

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12

From Decadence to Confidence: Mapping the Mind of Margaret Atwood's Protagonist in *Surfacing*

—Mrs. R.C. Sheila Royappa

The heroines of Atwood, after initial innocence of their nature, finally awaken to the reality of their own self. Then they journey towards their true self and ultimately reconcile to their lot. The narrator, a woman in her late 20s who remains unnamed in *Surfacing*, thus undergoes a metamorphosis, during a journey to her country cabin while searching her lost father. Her search for her lost father turns out to be a quest for self-discovery. Thus the loss and search of her father gets entangled by the search of her own self which bear fruit by an act of drowning and *Surfacing*.

When the novel begins the unnamed narrator returns to the isolated, northern cabin where she and her family had spent much of their time when she was a child. She is with her boyfriend, Joe, and a married couple, David and Anna. She has come to try and solve the mystery surrounding the disappearance of her father, who has been living alone in the cabin since the recent death of his wife. The narrator's father a "voluntary recluse" was a pacifist and a

rationalist. A botanist and tree scientist by profession, he retired to the cabin where he began studying Indian Rock paintings. His disappearance is the reason for the narrator's trip. The protagonist collects the keys from her father's best friend Paul, who had locked the cabin when he came to know that his friend had absconded. From the time, she reaches the cabin, she suffers from a strange notion that her missing father may wander freakily in the wilderness or watch them lurking behind the green leaves. From her musings, one gets an unreliable picture of the narrator. It seems that she had left the cabin nine years ago because of some unwanted incident and later got married and divorced her husband, abandoning her child with him. But she conceals the divorce and child abandoning from her parents and her lover Joe.

The narrator and the central character, an young commercial artist, narrates the book from the first person point of view. However, her tendency to distort the truth makes her an unreliable narrator. She is an alienated person and cold - blooded in her response to others. The narrator decides to probe into the stack of papers of her father in order to acquire some clues of his whereabouts. But she finds some undecipherable drawings, from which she could not make any sense. The company decides to extend their stay for one more week. During the extended stay she takes them to the nearby islands. On the way, Joe proposes to her and she refuses. One gets the idea that just because her first marriage culminated in divorce, she does not want to repeat it. She suffers from a complex and feels that she is not fit for love-making. Joe, the narrator's current boy friend, a failed potter earns his living by teaching. Joe lives with the narrator in the city. He and the narrator seem distant from each other. Moody and withdrawn, Joe is the opposite of the talkative David. His silence and 'furry' appearance link him with nature. More emotional than the narrator, he is deeply hurt by her refusal of his marriage proposal.

The narrator is thoroughly convinced that her father is not dead, and she is determined to find him. After their return to home, she makes a thorough search of the cabin and once again scrutinizes the drawings. At the end, amidst those drawings, she found a typed letter, from which she understands that her father had been taking

photographs of ancient Indian rock paintings to be sent to some researchers. Disguising the venture as a fishing excursion, she takes the companions near the spot marked on the map of her father, hoping to find some clue, but they find nothing. During the fishing trip, all they discover is some American tourists and the body of a great blue heron, which the narrator believes the Americans have senselessly killed. She begins to dislike killing of any kind. As for her, "the death of the heron was causeless, undiluted" (*Surfacing* 131). From her childhood, her parents had taught her about the cruelty of killing.

The next day she decides to make one final attempt to discover the rock paintings, all alone towards the cliff. She dives into the bottom of the lake to see what it is and to her great horror, sees something like a dark oval trailing limbs drifting towards her. It turns out to be the corpse of her father as his body was prevented by floating up by the weight of his camera, hanging around his neck. When she comes out, she suddenly becomes aware of the reality. The corpse of her father reminds her of her aborted foetus. She has never been married at all. Nine years ago, she was deceived by a married man. The wedding, held in a post office and conducted by a Justice of the peace and later revealed to be a lie. The narrator's former husband was, in fact, a 'fake husband', her art teacher. Although she once worshipped him, she later realizes he was only an average, middle-aged man. The narrator also pretends that their affair ended not in a birth but in an abortion. She was forced to undergo crude abortion by unqualified nurses. This impact of having killed a life much against her wishes made her run away from the house and later sent them a post card saying that she got married. This is the 'funny break' of her. From her childhood, she was taught that killing in any form, apart from food is an act of cruelty by her parents. This thought was so embedded within her, that when she was forced to undergo an abortion she felt herself as solely responsible for the death of an unborn child.

To escape from this guilty conscience, she fabricated a fake marriage, husband and a child. The protagonist repeats this lie so often to herself that not only she but also the readers get confused initially. But when she narrates about the incident that "I couldn't accept it, that mutilation, ruin I'd made. I needed a different version.

I pieced it together the best way I could [...]. A faked album [...] and I could almost live in it I'd lived in it until now" (*Surfacing* 143-144). That the marriage is only a fake has been best expressed by Atwood herself when asked about it in an interview, "Oh no. The marriage isn't real. She made it up" (Atwood, Interview, Gibson 21).

Her transformation is not complete and she perceives her parents to possess magical cure for her guilty conscience. Her preoccupation with herself increases to such an extent that she receives the death news of her father from David in a calm, unaffected manner. Now the reader knows that she is actually searching herself more than her father. The narrator has begun a quest for something. She says that it is the 'truth' that she has remained behind to find. But she is looking for not only the truth about the death of her father - indeed, this seems to be the last thing on her mind - but also the truth about herself. When she begins to cry and realizes that she is furious with her parents, the reader recognizes that the narrator is finally reacting emotionally to things. Her feelings have begun to return, and she is on her way to becoming whole again.

Her quest for truth is connected with what she calls the "power". Although this power is not clearly defined, it seems to be a combination of the force of nature and the ancient Indian Gods that she became aware of and in touch with after she dived into the lake. Psychologically, it could also be seen as the power of the unconscious. All of these powers are dangerous, and when the narrator wakes up in the middle of the night, she is scared. Her quest is dangerous, difficult and confusing, she feels that the power has left her and without it, she is without protection or directions. She knows that she must remain, but she is unsure what should be her next.

The next morning, when they are about to depart for the city, the narrator hides herself at the bottom of the canoe as she does not want to accompany them since she still waits for the answers from her parents and nature. "I am by myself; this is what I wanted, to stay here along. From any rational point of view I am absurd but there are no longer any rational points of view" (*Surfacing* 169).

Again she senses the power has returned and now her parents' presence offers her direction.

That night she breaks the window and stays inside the cabin all alone. The next morning, for the first time, she mourns the death of her parents, which indicates that her sense of feeling is slowly returning to her. The narrator remembers her mother as a lonely woman, mild-mannered and fond of birds and gardens. While the narrator's father is associated with reason, mother seems to represent emotion and natural cycles. She then senses what her parents want her to do and returns to the cabin, building a fire in the woodstove. She burns her drawings and the typescript, and destroys her briefcase. The ring her former lover gave her is purified by dropping it into the fire, and "everything from history" is then burnt: the scrap-books, her father's maps and drawings and the photo album, she then destroys the glasses, plates, books, blankets and clothes. When nothing is left, she leaves, taking one of the ripped blankets with her. Walking to the lake, she lies down in the water and removes her clothes, letting them float away. She immerses herself in the lake and observes; "When I am clean I come up out of the lake, leaving my false body floated on the surface [...]" an act of **Surfacing**, (*Surfacing* 178).

The final part shows her transformation completely from an inexperienced person to a matured person. First she decides to allow Joe's child to grow and have a natural birth and she says, "I can feel my lost child **Surfacing** within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long [...]" (*Surfacing* 162) and Rigney comments that "From this point onward, the novel replaces the images of division and death with images of unity, wholeness, life" (55).

At night she sleeps outside the cabin wanting to be one with nature. The next morning, she feels the baby growing inside her, she slowly begins to get rid of her guilt, when she nears the cabin, she sees the 'ghost' of her mother standing in front of the cabin and feeding the jays. As she watches, the narrator is afraid that her mother will vanish and suddenly, she does. She finds that her mother has been transformed into a bird. "The heroine of **Surfacing** is one of the few who rediscovers her mother, and thus rediscovers herself"

(Rigney 11). She also experiences total harmony with nature. Nature is no longer something she is alienated from or afraid of, she is now part of nature. Like her mother, her father appears to her in a vision, she sees her father change into a fish. Both her parents have become embodiments of nature, taking on the shapes of animals.

The next day she hears the sound of motorboat which comes in search for her. She hides herself once again since she still awaits for an answer from her father. After its return, she sees her father standing near the fence looking in at the garden. But when she goes near the fence, she finds him no more and the foot prints found there to be her own. The ambiguity of what she has seen and their influence upon her has been explained by Atwood when she says that **Surfacing** can be termed as a ghost story of the Henry James Kind, "in which the ghost that one sees is in fact a fragment of one's own self which has split off, and that to me is the most interesting kind and that is obviously the tradition I'm working in" (Atwood, Interview Gibson 29) and in another interview Atwood observes:

"She is obsessed with finding the ghosts, but once she's found them she is released from that obsession. The point is, my character can see that ghosts but they can't see her. This means that she can't enter the world of the dead, and she realizes, O.K., I've learned something Now I have to 'make my own life.'"

(Atwood, Interview Linda 43)

The narrator has changed as a result of her recent experiences. Her transformation is nearing completion. She has received the answer. Her parents are not magicians; they are simply dead. She realizes :

"The father in **Surfacing** is in reality no monster, no devil figure with antlers in the brain', no god capable of metamorphosis, no madman, and he undoubtedly never experiences the visions which the protagonist imagines for him [...]. His reality is that of a reasonable person, a scientist, a believer in the mode of the eighteenth century nationalist." (Rigney 54).

They do not possess any magical cure and as for her, she realizes that the abortion was not done on her own choice. It was a forced act and she was not greatly responsible for it. As she now understands, she re-enters the cabin and wears her dresses and eats

normal food once again. Now she slowly comes back to reality and states, “In my case I can’t stay here forever, there isn’t enough food [...]. they’ll never appear to me again [...] now on I’ll have to live in the usual way, defining them by their absence” (*Surfacing* 189).

The narrator gets ready to re-enter life. By accepting the truth about her past, especially about her abortion, she has also come to accept responsibility for herself and her actions. She is not a passive victim; she is just as capable of hurting someone as anyone else. As long as she pretended that she was the victim of a failed marriage for example, she could avoid taking responsibility for her love affair and the abortion she had as a result. Running away and distorting the truth is no longer a way of dealing with herself and others.

Her projection of her father as an insane has been the result of her own insanity. Now she has come to terms with herself:

“If the protagonist is ‘dead’ at the beginning of the novel, she must somehow be reborn, not in a religious sense; but psychological. In order to re-create herself, she must re-create her parents, remove them also from the world of lies and myths where in her madness she has placed them” (Rigney 53).

After having done that now everything is clear to her.

The protagonist in *Surfacing* at the beginning of the novel considers herself to be a victim. In other words, initially she is ignorant of her true self and she is not able to face the odds. But as the story unfolds, she slowly and steadily realizes her ability to fight. At last through her struggle, she gains enough experience and emerges wise at the end. She gains wisdom and it is obvious that the protagonist is victorious. The story may not have positive ending but the protagonist becomes matured and optimistic and thus ceases to be a victim.

The last chapter asserts, “this above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless [...]” (*Surfacing* 191). As she feels that further withdrawing from society is no longer possible, she decides to go with Joe when he comes in search of her. She decides to allow the child of Joe to grow inside her thereby conquering her guilt. Thus, “the symbolic conception, towards the end, indicates the

re-birth of her aborted child and signals the beginning of the process of her becoming whole again" (Salat 86).

The alienation, initial victimization, guilelessness, immaturity and decadence of the narrator is shown in a number of ways. She has a variety of disruptions in her personal relationships, which is made worse by communication problems. The barriers that she sets up between herself and others can be seen in the use of pronouns. She remains nameless throughout the book, referring to herself only as "I", She never reveals the names of her father, mother, brother or her "husband", referring to them as "they", He world is divided between herself and others, "I" and "they" She and her friends know very little about each other. The narrator avoids any closeness with Anna, her best friend. She is also alienated from her family. She is out of touch with her brother and had stopped visiting her family several years ago. Joe is another alienated person who prefers silence to speech. He and the narrator rarely talks, and she is never serve to each other what he is thinking or feeling. Their relationship also suffers from her utmost total lack of commitment. Finally, she chooses physical isolation – a voluntary seclusion from society and gets rid of anything human about herself, becoming more and more like an animal. She moves to a non-verbal level and explores other means of communication. She feels "the names of things fading but their forms and uses remaining", and English words begin to sound "imported, foreign." With the end of her visionary experience, she releases that she is no longer an animal and has become human again. Since human beings are social by nature, she realizes that she must rejoin society. With the return to society is also the return to language since it is needed for communication and the development of relationships between people.

The metaphor of drowning and *Surfacing* makes her realise the truth of life, and subsequently changes her into a matured and confident person. In this context it is apt to quote Rigney:

The protagonist is close to mental collapse in the beginning of the novel, and she must actually break down before she can break through [...]. Her immersion in the wilderness as well as her religious ecstasies are metaphors for her journey through her own subconscious mind, that place in which she can discover her past and affirm her identify, much as in a process of psychoanalysis (52-53).

This quotation capsulises the psychological journey of the unnamed protagonist into her subconscious mind and surfaces by clearing herself up. When the novel opens, she is devoid of a name, feelings, desire and suffers from emotional numbness. Thus from the initial fake marriage and childhood, from decadence and initial innocence, she transforms by experiencing contemplation, she transforms by experiencing contemplation, and is prepared to have a genuine marriage and childhood. In this way, she undergoes a transformation from initial ignorant of her true self to a responsible experiencer and a matured individual, and this transformation is summed up aptly by Salat:

“Hence when the protagonist surfaces from the depths of the lake, she surfaces with a new knowledge about herself that entails a re-assessment of herself in relation to the world. The psychological / spiritual journey towards self-discovery finds its culmination in a ritualistic re-alignment with the primitive world and a subsequent re-alignment with the lived-world with altered perspective and a new vision.” (82)

A few days of isolation in the Canadian wilderness, makes her a confident person. At last, she not only accepts the past, but also becomes, ready to face the future. Thus **Surfacing** in many ways is a brilliantly accomplished novel, where the protagonist drowns as an innocent victim but emerges as a wise, confident and an experienced individual.

Atwood’s heroines, when threatened and thwarted by domineering patriarchal structures, assert themselves by acquiring their identity. She treats women primarily as human beings in her novels. So, she advocates human rights for women. She rises above gender sensibilities and fights for human dignity in her novels. She is more of a social novelist and considers herself as a realist rather than a pessimist or feminist. Atwood is “neither a hard core feminist nor an anti-feminist but a clear-sighted humanist”.

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A Search for Identity in the Selected Novels of Rudy Wiebe

—Dr. T. Doris

Canada, in recent times, has witnessed immigration of people belonging to many diverse countries and cultures resulting in establishing a multicultural ethnic mosaic. The Canadians are in the process of forming a new identity, an identity that will be a composite of many diverse cultures. In the New land, these people experience a sense of wonder at the newness of their environment and nostalgia for the land they left behind. Then, they go through the phase of hard work and then once they are settled they become involved with the society in which they live and take part in all the activities of the majority community. This is the stage when these immigrants express their protest and anger at the discrimination and injustice meted out to them by the Canadian white establishment. The American establishment continues to remain a threat to the Canadian identity for the Canadians. The Canadians continue to feel insecure because of the proximity of the U.S. culture and feel compelled to resist identification with the U.S.

Most of the Canadian writers and critics have quite often grappled with the problem and strove to answer the question “who are we”? and invariably felt concerned about the vulnerable issue pertaining to the Canadian identity. The question of identity at modern English-Canadian fiction has broadly been approached at three levels involving the dimensions of national identity, regional

identity and personal identity. For some people identity is simply a pride in one's native land, for others it takes the form of goals and policies of the nation. The quest for identity by marginal ethnic groups in developing societies emerges as one of the major concerns in R. Wiebe's novels. Regional and socio-cultural variances are significant enough to engender a sense of dis-orientation and alienation. Canada, on the other hand, subscribes to the doctrine of multi-cultural ethos that protects the rights of ethnic cultures to maintain distinctive identities within the Canadian culture. The native and foreign born Canadians form a wide range of diversity in terms of appearance, life style and by virtue of the colour of the skin. Rudy Wiebe in his fictions attempts to recover indigenous cultural and mythic heritage and thereby provide a mode to combat the sense of minimal history engendered by the colonial experience that has, in a profound way, disallowed the assertion of a confident cultural and mythic inheritance and re-locating it within the framework of the national past. Wiebe, in his novels, attempts to provide both a cultural antiquity and a usable past, the absence of which has retarded the growth and evolution of cultural and literary identity in Canada. Moreover, in giving voice and being, to the silenced minority cultures of Canada, Wiebe's fiction typifies the emergence of the minority voices and their desires for recognition.

By relating the present with the ancient cultural history, Wiebe aspires to enable the Canadians to know what their origins are and who they are. In his first three novels, Wiebe de-constructs the Mennonite beliefs, and values and the Mennonite past and thereby, not only enables the Mennonite set to acquire a true perception of their present and the past, but also, by giving the voice to the marginalized culture group of Canada, gives it a being and a recognizable place within Canada's multi-cultural fabric. Wiebe's first three novels, *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962), *First and Vital Candle* (1966) and *The Blue Mountains of China* (1970) are written within the specificity of the Mennonite experience.

In *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Wiebe examines the central Mennonite tradition of pacifism through Thom Wein's problematic relation with his Wapiti Valley Mennonite community that is ruled with a tight fist by Deacon Peter Block. In Wapiti, 'peace' is seen as something external, something that issues from ordered, logical

code of conduct. As Deacon Block tells Herb: "No one can do anything without other people's co-operation. And we all want to live at peace together. That is best" (PSDM 77). Mennonite remains isolated and hence uncorrupted. However, as Elizabeth, the Deacon's daughter says, voicing Wiebe's criticism of this apartness: "A church is supposed to be brotherhood... not rules!" (PSDM 141). Deacon Block, thus, literally and metaphorically posits a 'blocked' vision. Joseph Dueck, to whose views Thom Wein is attached, symbolizes the conflicting and subversive voice and, in a profound sense, expresses Wiebe's own criticism of Deacon Block's "misguided interpretation of tradition" (PSDM 237) when he says that: "peace is a mighty inner river.... That is not affected by outward war but quietly overcomes it on life's real battle-field: the soul of man" (PSDM 162-3).

In his second novel, **First and Vital Candle**, Abe Ross, the central consciousness of the novel, is, unlike the innocent Thom Wein of peace, a wordly wise man who has known the horrors of war and violence and also the pain of loneliness. Whereas Thom moves from religious doctrines, Abe progresses from moral stupor to a gradual realization of the deeper meaning of love that helps him to re-integrate himself with humanity. Through Abe's father, Wiebe portrays another Decon Block-like figure whose narrow and misconceived religiosity leaves Abe hating not only his father but all religious beliefs altogether. It is Sally Howells, the school teacher, functioning as a figure of Grace, who succeeds in making Abe recover his humanity. Her deep piety, faith in Jesus and prayer and all-encompassing love break through the moral blocks and light the 'first and vital candle' in Abe's heart. In **First and Vital Candle**, Wiebe does not present as critique of the Mennonite beliefs and values so much as to establish their validity. In making Abe recover his lost humanity and rise out of his moral stupor through Sally and Josh, Wiebe endorses the viability and validity of the Mennonite vision. In his third novel, **The Blue Mountains of China**, Wiebe not only de-constructs the Mennonite beliefs and values for a truer perception of the Mennonite past towards enabling the Mennonites to see where they have come from and thereby know who they are. The novel depicts the stories of individual Mennonites and, at the same time, the story of a whole people spread over many decades

and several continents. It narrates the tale of the Mennonite's quest for the Promised Land of Peace and religious tolerance and traces the Mennonite's journey from 'there' to 'here', from past to present. As Allan Dueck observes:

"The critical exploration of Russian Mennonite history in *Blue Mountains* takes an important step towards defining who the Mennonites are today. Before a people can know who it is today, it must know who it was in the past....indeed, for any culture seeking its identity, a knowledge of its origins is essential" (Rudy Wiebe's Approach 186)

Since the Mennonite sect is relatively small, unknown the Mennonite's peculiar customs, anachronistic belief in pacifism alienate and marginalize them. Wiebe's de-construction of the Mennonite religious beliefs, values and the Mennonite socio-cultural history in his novels, especially *Blue Mountains*, fulfils two broad functions. For one, it enables the Mennonites to acquire an adequate self-perception and a sense of a recognizable and rooted identity. Secondly, in making the history and religion of the unknown and other minority culture known and visible, it helps not only to dispel prejudice and suspicion, bred by ignorance, against the minority culture but also to establish its valid claims as one of Canada's sub-cultures within the multi-cultural mosaic. **The Blue Mountains of China**, in particular, is an important landmark in Wiebe's writing career. The novel not only establishes him as "a major novelist", as W.J.Keith observes in (*Epic Fiction* 42), but it also equips him with an ideology that he employs in his subsequent writings. *Blue Mountains* quite clearly illustrates that for a culture to have a distinctive and a holistic identity, it is necessary for it to reclaim its heritage and relate the present with its inherited past. Hence, when addressing himself to the question of the Mennonite identity, Wiebe comes to address himself to the larger question of the Canada's indigenous cultural heritage so as to enable Canada to have a rooted and a holistic identity. At the same time, he gives 'voice' and 'being' to the Mennonite culture in the Mennoite novels. Wiebe does the same for the other marginal sub-cultures of Canada, the Native Indian and the Metis.

Indians appear in all the three Mennonite novels as secondary characters and function to precipitate Wiebe's conscious antipathy towards the White Mennonite Christians' marginalization and inferiorization of the Native Indians. In **Peace Shall Destroy Many**, for instance, Wiebe, through Joseph Dueck and Thom Wein, expresses his disapprobation of Deacon Block's refusal to extend Christian brotherhood to the Native Indians, even those who are Christians. Thom Wein's question to his mother, "And why must we in Wapiti love only Mennonites?" (PSDM 215) quite explicitly pleads for Wiebe's desire for an integrative vision that includes the Native Indians and the Metis as well. This integrative vision crystallizes quite unequivocally when Wiebe writes: "You couldn't tell... the difference between Jackie Labret and Johnny Lepp by the White Mennonite Christians and Jackie Labret is a half-breed, and yet, "You couldn't tell...the difference"(PSDM 128). As Francis Mansbridge, referring to young Hal's and Jackie Labret's friendship and affection for each other, observes: "Their warm, natural relationship indicates hope in the younger generation for inter-racial harmony that the older and most of the younger Mennonites cannot accept"(45). Wiebe, through Hal and Jackie, therefore, expresses a hope which is, at the same time, his heartfelt desire for a similar inter-racial harmony.

Rudy Wiebe's writings, posit significant fictional ideological structures and strategies that constitute viable and valid modes towards a resolution of the Canadian crisis identity. For these reasons, therefore, the post-1960s period has been known figuratively as the Canadian renaissance because it marked the new beginnings in Canadian writings in the quest for the elusive Canadian identity.

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Recovering The Broken Threads of Their Lives: A Study of Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash*

—Dr. A. Mohan Kumar

“Native literature means Native people telling their own stories, in their own ways, unfettered by criteria from another time and space” (Grant, 125). Consequent to the ratification of the New Canadian Constitution of 1982, there arose among the Native people of Canada, a renaissance of interest in their indigenous culture and it resulted in a flowering of ethnic writing based on indigenous culture and values. Native Canadian writers like Jeannette Armstrong took bold creative initiatives and changed the contours of historical perception by presenting new inputs in the understanding of native tradition and culture. The accepted ideas of the native history propagated by the colonizers were thus subverted giving way to a new historiography. Jeannette Armstrong, an Okanagan Indian, the first Native woman novelist from Canada, portrays in her works the natives’ encounter with the reality of colonialism. They are stranded between two time spans and find themselves in living death. Yet they draw strength from their traditional culture and attempt to find a way out.

The novel, **Slash** by Armstrong is a study of the native struggle to assert and affirm the Native perspective where *Slash*, an

Okanagan Indian, journeys through the perils of the dominant society's culture. However, the journey finally leads him to the acceptance of his identity within the society at large through his realization of the fact that traditional culture is the ground on which he must defend himself. This paper purports to examine Jeannette Armstrong's attempts to reorient historical perspective through her fictional character Slash, who mediates between two cultures, traditional and modern, and struggles to establish or reclaim an identity by boldly questioning the established values and reaffirming faith in tradition.

The protagonist of the novel, Thomas Kelasket, later nicknamed Slash as the novel progresses, embarks on a series of journeys which mould his growth as a person and his place in the world. He moves away from his traditional life in the Okanagan reserve to have his education in a white school which causes his cultural alienation. He tries to assimilate the new culture as he has to either "assimilate or get lost" (70). He is thus forced to live in a world of make-belief and finally returns to his own past by learning to be proud of himself and his culture and regain his security and pride as an Okanagan Indian.

The novel begins with Thomas Kelasket entering the school as a sensitive boy who leaves his happy traditional environment to pursue his studies, where he is exposed to a world of material values. He is torn between his inherited values and the enticement of the white values symbolized by its consumer products. He is dissatisfied with himself and says, "I also felt ashamed at school because we didn't have T.V. and a new car, Heck, I didn't even have new clothes, let alone a bike" (26). He regrets for what he does not possess and the school creates in him a sense of shame by making his mind long for his place in the modern culture, though he is fully aware of the Indian ways and proud of it because, "a lot of it had good feelings tied to it" (26). But his friend Jimmy has no regard for his Native heritage and Tommy also falls a prey to this attitude, in spite of his father's warning to him to "be proud that you're Indian" (23), though they are taught to be stupid and to continue this by a distorted version of history that they are inferior and the whites are superior. As Armstrong puts it:

The suicide rates and problems our people are having are a result of being told you're stupid, ignorant, a drunk, you'll never amount to anything - just because you're Indian. To me, that's the biggest lie of all that needs to be dispelled. (Lutz, 15)

Tommy subjugates himself to the pressures of the white culture since the "white people wished we would all either be just like them or stay out of sight" (36). He forsakes the Indian ways and his initiation into the dominant culture begins with his drinking beer. He says, "It was the first time I drank beer. It tasted awful but I wanted to see what drunk was like" (46). Further he tries to forget his problem and himself in the process of assimilation by taking drugs. By eschewing tradition for the sake of modernity, Tommy indulges in drug business in Vancouver. He meets Mardi, his first real love, who gives him the nickname Slash after his fight in a bar. She inspires him to tell her about his life at the reserve. Slash describes his love for Mardi thus:

I fell terribly in love with her. I wanted to be near her every possible minute and breathe her soft scent. She smelled fresh like sage and cedar and her skin was even brown and smooth like those hills in Okanagan. (62)

This happiness is only short-lived because Slash is sent to prison and his confinement has a tremendous impact on his personality. He feels that there is no meaning in his existence and wants to commit suicide because only after his death, he can "go home to them mountain" (67). By singing a song, he releases his mental tension and he pins his hope on his land which will give him peace of mind. Only his remembrance of the past saves him at this critical juncture. He is like, "Native people in desperate circumstances [...] those who need to recover the broken threads of their lives" (Lee Maracle, 10).

Mardi motivates him to become an active member of the political action group, of which she is also a member, after his release from prison. He realizes that he deserves the punishment because he is an instrument used by the western people to denigrate his own people and he says, "One which I understood better and better [...]. I finally began to understand why I had deserved to be punished for working in the dope business" (77). This change results

in his longing to go home and hug his father and find solace and comfort in his roots. He goes to his home and tells his father in Okanagan, "I have returned" (78) which symbolizes his return to the traditional native culture. He also clears the misconception that it was not his lenient upbringing that was responsible for his ignoble behaviour but the "white school where everybody was different and that was what made you confused and dissatisfied" (80).

Slash feels that there is something missing in him and he is search of that and tells Jimmy, "Seems to me there is something more important I'm missing out on [...] until I have some idea of what I want" (84). He meets his people in the reserves and has a startling revelation that lack of formal education is the source of their strength since education deprives them of their tradition. He learns how their history has been replaced by the dominant society's version and how they are treated and, "how cheap the life of an Indian is to a white man whose status quo is threatened" (115). He is angry when he sees, "a lot of women raped and beaten and old people battered around" (115).

Instead of returning to his traditional roots, his anger makes him militant and he gets involved in the 'Trail of Tears' protest, a movement against the forced eviction of the Native people from their land to settle the white people in the Southeastern United States. Land is a definition as a people for the natives and by evicting the Native population from their land, the westerners have robbed them also their identity, culture and history. Armstrong's intention to rewrite history is quite evident here as she gives a detailed account of past history, and "her aim is to give not just the historical documentation of that time but beyond that, the feeling of what happened just prior to the American Indian Movement, and what happened during the militancy period" (Harmut Lutz, 14).

Slash takes a wrong path, like his counterparts, by mixing native thought with political activism to settle the land claims issue. This retrograde move distorts and defeats the very purpose of the movement and this is a result of the male chauvinism, a hallmark of European civilization, inherited by Slash from his assimilation. It is also detrimental to his growth and slowly he discovers his feminine or soft powers. According to Armstrong, it is only through this

“reconciliation of both male and female and the wholeness and healthiness of who we are as human beings” (Williamson, 19). Slash may be able to achieve his goal. He dances with people and reconciles himself to his sensitivity by saying, “I felt I should shout or run like anything” (120).

In late November, he decides to return home again, to his own land, the mother of the Native people, and “the brown earth hills of the Okanagan are like a woman’s skin; brown and rich, needing nothing more to be beautiful”(130). Slash realises that his so-called assimilation is not there in the aping of the legacy, history passed on by the masters but in blending the old ways with the new. Impotent anger, rash decisions and protests will not solve their problems and issues can be sorted out only through balanced negotiations. But the transformation of Slash is not complete because he is still too weak to overcome his angry disposition.

Slash confides to Uncle Joe, “I did learn a lot of things while I was gone, but I’m falling to pieces. I ain’t as strong as I thought. It’s like I’m mad inside all the time” (132). Joe advises him: “You got the spirit in you, that’s why them songs bother you so much. Don’t deny them. We are Indians [....]. Just don’t let the drink and drugs and hate win you over” (133). Without heeding to his advice, Slash gets addicted to alcohol and drugs when he goes back to participate in the political movement. He soon finds that their endeavour is futile and the “fat people in government” (158) will neither respect them nor their culture. As one of the guys puts it:

The only Indians they see are the ones assimilated enough to wear ties and suits. Now the people like us, who are just plain, in jeans and long hair, we speak for those poor people on the reserves but they don’t want to hear us [....]. It is a total shame they always treat Indians as if we were dogs or something. (158)

Slash returns home to face, “the people he most wanted not to” (163), when his sister comes and informs him about the death of his brother Danny, due to alcoholism. His stay at home in Spring to comfort his parents makes him feel that he has missed so many things in his life. He says, “I missed all those things when I was away. I missed them like the language of my people” (167). This has a soothing effect on his personality and as he remarks, “The hard

things inside me melted and I finally cried the tears for my brother whose death was the death of many. I cried the tears that were for them all" (167). When he takes part in the Okanagan political struggle, he finds oneness with them. Moreover, he learns many things from the old people. As he puts it; "One of the most exciting things that happened was the learning by the young people from the old people" (173). This is an important lesson he learns because only tradition can teach them to cope up with modern times. But, as usual, he leaves his home again.

It is very clear that whenever he is away from home he succumbs to evil ways and tries to escape from oppression. But now he does not surrender himself totally and realizes the importance of his body and his existence through a kind of vision. He gets admitted in a detox camp run by the Natives where he gets a new message, the message for his life, the way that is a return to the tradition they know. As Currie has observed: "it is a return to the way that has everything to do with Native people actively determining their own futures" (Currie, 150).

There is a magical transformation in Slash which makes him realize, "how important and how precious my existence was. I was necessary. I realised then that it had been something that had been missing all my life" (203). He reposes confidence in the Indian ways and only his Indian tradition can serve as a guiding star. When he finally returns home, his father who has taught him the superiority of their culture, is in the hospital. He recovers his health slowly and Slash is very happy. Old people like the Okanagan leader Pre-Caw teach him that "most Indians have knowledge of different ways and values and that's what comes into conflict with some of the values that are taught to them in schools and by society as a whole" (212). As Edward Said observes: "The reality of colonialism was in fact a reversal of the traditionally accepted paradigm by which Europe gave their colonies their modernity" (Said, 164). The tragedy with the colonised, according to Slash, "is the way people see themselves in relation to those who are colonising" (221).

Slash overcomes this by empowering himself to empower his people. He loves Maeg, marries her, settles at Okanagan, and has a son, Marlon. He describes his happy life during his visit to Flint

Rock thus: "Just, her, me, Marlon and the hills, the beautiful earth, with everything there for her and me" (247). They are a part and parcel of the landscape, the tradition that has healed his wounds. Maeg dies in a car accident but this does not affect him badly as his son, who represents the next generation, will continue the struggle. He says, "You are the part of me that extends in a line up towards the future" (250).

The novel ends with an assertive declaration by Slash:

I feel old and I think I have seen many things for a young person. I have made my stand and chosen my path and I decide to tell my story for my son and those like him because I must. (252)

"He has this vindicated his stand that history has to be rewritten from the perspective of the Native Okanagan, thereby justifying the stand of Jeannette Armstrong who asserts that it is essential for the people of Okanagan to tell their own history as, "the only Correct version has got to be from our people! Nobody else can give the correct version, but our people. And we're going to stick to that" (1993, 14).

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15

Colonial Impact on the “Metis” : A Study of Beatrice Cullen’s *In Search of April Raintree*

—Mrs. T. Jayasudha

Surprisingly there is very little research done in cultural matters that exist in relation to Canada. The history of settlement and migration to cast light on contemporary struggles between what has been constructed as the national cultural main stream and those who belong to groups that have traditionally been excluded from this construct because of race / ethnicity that is indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. Two terms ‘Multiculturalism’ and ‘Post-Colonialism’ are included to register Canada’s “Metis” in context. Multiculturalism is a term that has a wide currency, both with the Public and the State, while Post-Colonialism is found primarily in academic discourse. Multiculturalism tends to apply to local and contemporary national or even sub national areas, such as cities, as Winnipeg in **In Search of April Raintree**, while Post-Colonialism tends to apply to a global phenomenon, often, implicitly grounded is the past era of empire-building, rather than neo-colonial era of global capital.

Multiculturalism is often seen as involving an analysis that ignores political disparities, and has often been linked to well-meaning liberal attempts to view everyone as equal without having

to grapple with historical, political and economic injustices. Post-Colonialism contains an implicit anti-imperialistic stance, one that is often somewhat muted by the historical perspective of most post-colonial analysis. This paper aims at bringing these terms together to signal to engage the contemporary and the local in an analysis which relates the past to the present lives of the contemporary Metis people in Canada. As

[...] the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write with his own generation in his bones, ... which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together.

(Eliot 169).

Much has been said and written on the ways in which minorities have been marginalized by dominant groups within national and global formations. But there has not been much analysis on the dynamics of community within and between minority groups. Indeed only when such groups reveal their inevitable differences through their writings, which most often don't get easily accepted, that the very notion of minority cultural networks are recognized even as existing.

Will native culture die as intermarriage proceeds apace? Beatrice Culleton's **In Search of April Raintree** shows the devastating force of the myth of racial difference in the lives of two Metis sisters, one who passes for white, the other who asserts proudly that she is Native. The novel, in which the 'white' sister, is raped by men who call her "squaw" and the 'Native' sister who commits suicide shows how little space there is in Western Culture for the "hybrid" though, "Hybridity and Cultural polyvalency is characteristic of our contemporary life in general and everyone celebrates not only fluidity, but also anarchy albeit with a sense of responsibility" (Krishnaswamy et al 92).

The word 'Metis' has two different meanings in Canada: any mixed-blood Indian ("Metis" just means "mixed" in French,) who has his own Aboriginal status in Canada; or a member of a particular cultural group of mixed ancestry, the descendants primarily of French traders and 'Cree Indians'. Only the latter group speak the "Michif language" (<http://Michif language and the Metis People.htm>).

The first exploration of the New World (NA) occurred in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when the Norse tried settling in Newfoundland. In later centuries explorers returned to their homelands reporting stories of blue-eyed Indians. The distinctive nation and culture of the Metis solidified later in the history of North America after the first wave of explorers returned with stories of untold wealth of the new land and claimed the territory for their respective monarchs and countries, and the settlement of North America by Europeans was begun.

The Word 'Metis' comes from the Latin *miscere*, meaning "to mix", and was used originally to describe the children of the Indian mothers and European fathers. Another term for the Metis is derived from the Ojibwa (Indians) word '*Wissakodewinmi*', which means 'half burnt woodsmen', describing their lighter complexion in comparison to that of the full-blood Indians. The French picked up the translation and often used the term Bois Brûlé, or 'burnt-wood' for the Metis. They were also called by various other names including: country-born, Black Scots, Metis anglaise, the Flower Bead Work People, the Buffalo People, Breeds and Half-Breeds. One consistent characteristic that describes the Metis is implicit in the name the Cree gave them meaning "their own boss" or "people who own themselves".

(<http://Aboriginal People.htm>)

The Metis who call themselves "the forgotten people" are a mixed blood people. The joining of two worlds - the Old World (Europeans) and the New World (North American Indian) created a totally new nation or race of people. There is a criteria necessary to be recognized as a distinct nation of people - from food, clothing, flag, history, political movement. All these and more were met by the Metis long before the creation of Canada and the US. However historical records show that the Metis were often overlooked, exploited, exterminated or marginalized out of their rights. Shunned and ostracized by both the Indians and Whites, the Metis were distinct in their behaviour, their attitudes and their choice of defining themselves. A continuity of who a Metis is, shows itself long before they or Canada were organized into political forces. North American history is rich with the involvement of Metis and yet to this day, the Metis are without a land base and are recognized in principle only

by just the Canadian Government. Without the Metis, Canada would look much different than it does today.

Historically, the Metis shared the entirety of the Canadian North West running from the northern forests of Newfoundland, Quebec and Ontario; throughout the present day Prairie Provinces and into British Columbia; from below the United States/Canada border as far south as Louisiana.

The Metis share a claim to Aboriginal title with many Indian Nations in Canada and the US. That claim was re-affirmed in Canada through the Manitoba Act of 1870; the Dominion Lands Act; and the Canada Act of 1982. Although the Canadian Government's contempt of the rights of the Metis Nation were demonstrated in 1870 and 1885 in a manner parallel to events occurring today in Palestine, Kuwait and South Africa; those rights continue to exist affirmed and defined by recent Supreme Court of Canada decisions.

The Metis should be recognized as Canada's Aboriginal people : they are the only nation of Aboriginal People indigenous to the formation of Canada and are the true spirit of Canada and a huge source of Canadian Identity. Others in the province migrated to North America and are not indigenous. The Metis came into being from the clash and mixing of two distinct cultures when the New World came into being. The Metis nation was instrumental in the formation of Canada and deserves special recognition for their huge contribution to the evolution of Canada.

The Metis struggle for recognition and protection of their rights is the history of Canada. Every phase of Canadian history touched upon the Metis and in turn the Metis left their mark on most major historical events:

- The rivalry between France and Britain for mastery of the continent.
- The struggle of the Catholic Church for a place in a Protestant country.
- The battle between rival groups for dominance of the fur trade in the Western Culture.
- The 1870 and 1885 rebellions and growth of settlement in the Prairies.

- The formation of the Province of Manitoba.
- The formation of the world famous Royal Canadian Mounted Police.
- Arising again during the devastating years of the great Depression on the Canadian Prairies.
- And the campaign for a new constitution in the 1980s. (<http://Aboriginal People.htm>)

Lillian M. Turner writes:

Culleton, herself a Metis who suffered the trauma of family separation, foster homes, and the suicide of two older sisters, has written an honest, poignant account of the toll exacted by poverty, alcoholism, prostitution, suicide, prejudice and discrimination on the human spirit, and perhaps more importantly, the craving for self identity of the native person lost in an urban environment (13).

Representation of race and ethnicity in twentieth century Canadian writing for the most part is in English. A recurrent theme is the tension and contradictions of the construction of ethnic or racial specificity in a multi-cultural context, where such identities can function as a means of both asserting and containing differences. What the assignation of minority of racialised identity does to the traditional author-function, and how these writers negotiate with the pressures of authenticity, how their texts engage with nationalist discourse and history; sexual and gender politics, issues of diasporic memory and belonging, problems of commodification, and questions of ethics and solidarity.

Beatrice Culleton's **In Search of April Raintree** centers around April Raintree who is a metis, and lived in Winnipeg with her sister Cheryl and her parents. The Raintrees - Henry and Alice are alcoholics and the children believed that they were taking only medicine. Cheryl resembled her father in her native Indian looks and April resembled her mother who was Irish and partly Ojibway. April got the crude shock of her life in her childhood when many people visited their house during Christmas. April chanced to see her mother share her bed with a stranger. She was never able to recover from that shock.

April used to have a pleasant holiday during Summer when she went to the nearby park with Cheryl. April sensed that the white

children rejected their company in the park. She was at a loss to understand why the white children always maintained a distance from them, "... they didn't care to play with Cheryl and me. They called us names and bullied us" (SAR 15). Her childish nature did not go beyond what was easily available at hand and so she was very happy in Cheryl's company despite being neglected and isolated. The happiness did not last long. The arrival of Mrs. and Mr. Gray to take them away and leave them in an orphanage changed their life altogether. Cheryl was isolated from April and sent to a foster home. April was taken by Mrs. Semple, a social worker to her first foster home, the Dion family. April didn't have much to bother at the Dions as she was taken care of very well. It was more than April could ask for. April's stay in her first foster home came to a sad end when Mrs. Dion fell sick. April had to be sent to the DeRosiers farm. Mrs. DeRosier was very strict and cunning. The DeRosier children were no better : they always enjoyed teasing April and were very rude to her. April's life became very miserable. April's innocence was shattered when she learnt through the DeRosiers that her parents were drunkards. She decided to keep the truth to herself and not reveal anything to Cheryl.

Cheryl was also brought to the DeRosiers as Mac Adams had no separate room for Cheryl. Cheryl was not like April. When the DeRosiers ill-treated her, she started fighting with them. Mrs. DeRosier discriminated April and called her "half-breed" (SAR 39). The DeRosier children didn't spare her either. Maggie once remarked, "You didn't even sweep the floor. I heard you half-breeds were dirty but now I can see that it's true" (SAR 41).

Educational Institutions didn't spare them from discrimination. Cheryl's history teacher once told them that the Red Indians massacred White explorers and missionaries. Cheryl strongly opposed the charges and was referred to the Principal for unruly behaviour. Cheryl was very stubborn and refused to apologise even when she was forced. Her argument was that history was always biased. It had failed to record how the White people had destroyed the Indian way of life. The Principal slapped Cheryl and sent for Mrs. DeRosier. Cheryl was, as a consequence, threatened to be separated from her sister April if she did not obey. Mrs. DeRosier went to the extent of cutting Cheryl's hair. April too was punished

when she attempted to support Cheryl. Mrs. DeRosier shouted, "No two-bit little half-breed is going to yell at me like that" (SAR 59). Without any prior notice, Cheryl was isolated from April and sent to the Steindalls.

April's life became very miserable. She had double suffering - at home and at school. April was called "Gramma Squaw" (SAR 72) and was accused of having relationship with two boys, Raymond and Gilbert, who were with the DeRosiers. Rescue came in the form of Mr. Wendell who understood her plight and admitted her in St. Bernadette's Academy. April graduated and became totally free from foster homes and dependency. She procured a job as legal secretary at a law firm.

Cheryl was sent to the Winnipeg Native Friendship Centre. She involved herself in social service as she believed that this experience would help her build a future career. Cheryl enrolled to University education. April met Jerry MacCallister, Cheryl's professor and spent time with him. She believed that he would marry her. Her belief was dampened when she learnt through a phone call to his residence that he was a married man. The truth hurt her and forced her to give up Jerry who was her first lover. In the meantime, she met Bob Radcliff and accepted his proposal not out of love but because he was a White and a wealthy man. April had always desired for assimilation and acceptance by the White people. Marrying Bob seemed to materialize her dreams. After her marriage, April came to know that Bob was really in love with Heather, an actress and that he had married her only "to get back at" his mother. April left Bob and went to help Cheryl as she had been suffering from hypothermia. April decided to stay on with Cheryl for the rest of her life. While at Cheryl's place, April was raped by three men. She managed to notice their faces and noted down the car number. She filed a case and was admitted in the hospital. The Police had the culprits arrested and the car seized from its owner, Stephen Gurman. Donelly, the leader of the three men was also arrested. During the legal proceedings in the court, April learnt that her own sister, Cheryl was a prostitute and that she had been raped by mistake.

Cheryl returned after a few days only to torment April. She told her that their mother was an escapist and had committed suicide

by jumping off Lousie Bridge and that their sister Anna was dead. She blamed April for not paying attention to her. Cheryl left April and her whereabouts were not known.

Nancy, Cheryl's friend with whom Cheryl stayed was herself a half-breed. Her plight was worse than that of the Raintrees. She "had been raped by her drunken father" (SAR 106). Nancy took to prostitution like her mother because they had nothing else to do to earn a living. Cheryl too prostituted and paid for the father's expenses. She was upset when her father complained and hurt her feelings when she didn't have any money. The women of the mixed-race and the Red Indian women who were the marginalized were forced by the demoralized culture into roles which were very oppressive and traumatic. Nancy later informed April of Cheryl's suicide from Lousie Bridge like her mother.

After Cheryl's funeral, April learnt about Cheryl's life and relationships. Cheryl's separation from April, the death of her mother and sister, Anna, Mark's exploitation - all these had made Cheryl a drunkard and a prostitute. April also comes to know that Cheryl had a baby boy whom she decided to adopt. Henry Liberty Raintree, Cheryl's son symbolizes to April of prosperity for her people. She resolves to groom Henry to uplift the Indians for the sake of her sister and her son, for her parents and for her people.

Women, when marginalized, are only objects of sex. Cheryl is forced to go to bed with other men by Mark whom she trusted very much. He tells her, "Just think of it as a business transaction. I told him you were a very special girl and he's willing to pay more for you" (SAR 224). Cheryl's dream of building a future career was shattered when she met her father and learnt all the details about her parents and her family. This awareness blurred her vision of her prospective future and she indulged herself in prostitution and alcoholism.

When April was raped, the incident left a scar and not a wound which she had to carry all through her life. If April's parents died it was because of their inability to withstand hardships in life and their choice of the wrong route to escape from the crude realities of life. Escaping from realities does not help anyone achieve things in life. Facing problems with immense courage and unfailing hope helps attain success.

In Search of April Raintree lends itself to Post-Colonial reading as the protagonist is rooted in the power struggle between the white Coloniser and the ethnic Colonised, Metis. Krishnaswamy defines Colonialism thus :

Colonialism is very much a part of the power-dynamic operating in any human situation. The dictionaries, even today, define 'colonialism' as a 'practice' by which a powerful country controls less powerful countries and uses their resources in order to further its own interests, wealth and power (90).

What the 'Metis' have faced in this novel is what every 'native' in each of the colonial cultures has faced. One can draw analogies from the different invasions which have affected people. To cite an Indian example, Mogul invasions, imperial rule, the world wars and the recent gulf wars have had their impact on every Indian ethnic group and their ways of life. Multiculturalism has been a live phenomenon not only in Canada but in many parts of the world as well.

The need for reclaiming one's own past and erasing the debunking of the past by the Colonised as part of the 'cultural resistance' is inevitable. Post-Colonial texts aim at 'seeing' the post colonial era by shedding the 'amnesia' that set in during the colonial period. Culleton has made April Raintree the spokesperson for the Metis. April and her younger sister Cheryl, when only six and four years old, were taken from their parents by the Children's Aid Society, first to a convent orphanage, and then to various foster homes. Even though often separated, they always thought about and wrote to each other. April was the white Metis, while Cheryl was totally Indian in appearance. Both children excelled in school, but while April dreamed of integrating into the white society, Cheryl dreamed of becoming a social worker funding her parents rebuilding the family and eventually helping children like herself. Perhaps because of the immediacy of the first person narrative, the reader is inevitably drawn into the controversy regarding attitudinal ethics and the question of foster homes and adoption of native children.

April Raintree is an important addition to the supplementary reading list for native studies, Canadian family, and people in society courses, as well as thematic units in Canadian Literature.

(Turner 13)

In the multicultural context, the focus now is not on archetypes or universal themes but on the marginalized.

Foregrounding differences and diversity, celebrating hybridity, plurality and 'Otherness' as potential sources of vitality and change, and rejecting notions like standardization, conformity, universalisation that are seen as sources of power, hegemony and colonialism these notions are gaining ground in critical thinking. It focuses on bringing to the limelight the hidden agenda of colonialism and imperial rule and drawing the world's attention to the "suppressed local culture and their traditions"

(Krishnaswamy 93).

Peter Barry in **Beginning Theory** draws out three phases of post-colonial studies: adoption, adaptation and adeptness. The third phase deals with the mind of the Colonised which struggles and attains freedom from the imperial shackles and attempts to give expression to its 'real' experiences which incidentally is "cross-cultural". The Metis were psychologically uprooted and isolated. The Metis, (the natives) were lonely in the midst of the multitude the (white) Colonisers. Beatrice Culleton records Metis experiences first hand and wins acclaim for her bold expression. Culleton shows how discrimination and segregation leads to fractured selves. April ends up with the most agonizing experience of being raped and asserted as an Indian, which she detested. Cheryl's dream of reaffirming her nativity too is collapsed and she is caught in her natural family syndrome of prostitution and alcoholism.

In Search of April Raintree emerges out of the Colonised experience and asserts itself by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing the plight of the Metis through Culleton's own personal experiences. When the British and other Europeans like the French, Dutch and Portuguese colonised India, they left the legacy and impact of colonialism. This shows very clearly that a distinction between settlers, their literature and their impact, on the one hand, and the Colonised, their literature and the colonial impact on them, on the other must be made to make any post-colonial studies meaningful in the global context. Annihilation of Native literature and sweeping away of all sources of their pride and rendering their literature and existence dependant upon a Colonised unknown country will degrade the native country's

character. Instead expression of their own ancestral past will provide them adequate energy to reassert themselves and achieve progress, freedom and intellectual achievement. Any amount of historical records do not stand testimony to reality as "history is always 'narrated'" and is "never available to us in pure form, but always in the form of 'representations'" and misrepresentations ... There is no single 'history', only discontinuous and contradictory 'histories'" (Selden 105). What Tipu Sultan's Minister, quoted in Parliamentary Papers, 1852-53 is true of any country that had once been colonised. "We are not afraid of what we do see of the British power, but of what we do not see" (Krishnaswamy 95).

To conclude, Beatrice Culleton's success as an ethnic voice and her acclaim in the literary world show that the world has realised the impact of colonialism on the Metis and will no longer accept biased views on the ethnic communities. The recent focus on "marginalized" literature has brought to the forefront the trauma that communities have experienced. What Culleton has accounted in **In Search of April Raintree** is only the tip of the ice burg. Her optimistic note has laid the foundation for rehabilitating the Metis' to their glorious past. Culleton is true when she affirms that drunkenness and escaping into a world of alcoholism will not bring about any social change. The will to fight and struggle for the right cause without any room for withdrawal will only sow the seeds of success. "Raintree" foregrounds and suggests the onset of 'spring' and rain, which stand for growth and prosperity. Culleton's vision in a linear growth unlike her parents and other of her race assures definite victory and prosperity for the Metis. They can no longer remain docile as 'the forgotten people' but have to combat the colonial impact on their society and re-establish their ancient glory.

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Lillian M. Turner, York Memorial C.I., Toronto, ON. Reviewed Vol. 12/1 January 1984 p. 13.

16

Native Literary Traditions of Canada—an Archetypal Analysis

—Dr. (Mrs.) R.Radhiga Priyadharshini

The many aboriginal cultures of Canada have a variety of narratives to formulate their understanding of the Universe. Their concept about the Universe and their place in it are strange to the mind steeped in European tradition. Penny Petrone observes, “The natives posed serious challenges to traditional authority: that of Aristotle and the ancients, the Bible, and the Church fathers. These people of the New world seemed to have no definite place in the Renaissance world picture” (Petrone 1). Like the native Canadians, the Hindus have certain beliefs regarding themselves and the Universe, which are new to the European mind. Ahab’s wonder at the white whale as “thou Hindu half of nature” (Melville 606) could describe the mystery of the native Canadian’s pantheistic identification with nature. The archetypal analysis of the native Canadian literary tradition will unveil the mystery shrouding it and render richer meanings to its rich tradition.

Central to the ancient oral traditions of Canada is the power of the word or what Hindus believe as *mantra shakthi*. Whether Cree or Obijway, Iroquois or Micmac, Haida, Tlinglit, or Hare, Loucheux or Montagnais, each in story, speech, or song made the word sacrosant of far greater importance than people in literate cultures were generally aware of. As the natives believed the word having

power to create, medicines to heal, plants to grow, animals to be caught and man to be spiritually initiated, they sought to shape and control the cosmic forces with the help of the word.

Sir John Woodroffe says that the creative power of thought is now receiving increasing acceptance in the West. Thought-reading, thought transference, hypnotic suggestion are getting popular acceptance. The doctrine is ancient among Hindus and what is not understood in the West is the particular form of thought-science. The native Canadians understood this science and used them to control the cosmic forces. An Obijway song of healing says

You will recover; you will walk again
 It is I who say it; my power is great
 Through our white shell I will enable
 You to walk again

(Densmore 73)

The Sekani Indians of northern British Columbia sang this medicine song to the Caribou to obtain healing powers:

I need your help, O Caribou
 Come swiftly to me.
 You see I have laid my hands on the sufferer
 Come and lay your hoofs where I have laid my hands,
 I need your help
 Without your help there is no healing in my hands today.
 Come so quickly that your tail stands erect.

(as quoted in Petrone 20)

These magical words are believed to reach the spirits through the medium of what Hindu call Akash or sky, the subtlest of the five elements. Fire is the element, the native Canadians like Hindus believe, that carries the offering to the other world. Hindus do Yagnas or offering the choicest things to the holy fire to be carried over to the particular god whose name they chant. An Aroquoian prayer towards fire runs like this.

Invocation
 May the scent of the tobacco
 I have thrown on the fire
 reach thee to let thee know
 we are still good,

and that thou mayest give us
all that we have asked.

(as quoted in Petrone 21)

Wind is, as Shelley wrote, the vehicular power, which carries hope to the distressed. "Thus sisters! Shall the breeze of hope, / Through sorrow's clouds a vista open;" (as quoted in Petrone 59).

The ancient Hindus visualised God Shiva holding the sky-born river Ganga on his head. A native Canadian writing echoes a similar idea, in the presence of the fall of Niagara.

.. I went down to see the greatest fall in the world. The cataract is indeed awfully grand; and it appeared to me as if an angry God was dwelling beneath it, for my whole frame shook as a leaf while I was viewing these mighty angry Falls. Now its no wonder that my forefathers, in bygone days, should offer up sacrifices at the foot of these Falls; they used to come and pray to the God of the fall to bless them in their hunt and to prolong their life and that of their children; for every Indian believed that a God dwelt under this mighty sheet of water... (as quoted in Petrone 51)

Rabindranath Tagore had the same imagination, where he associates Lord Bhairava, the angry destructive aspect of Shiva with the fall of Mukta-Dhara.

The last base element - the earth has its secrets to the native Canadians. "The Girl who married the Bear" is one of the popular stories of the Southern Yukon Indians. Four girls went to a forest to collect berries. One girl upset her berries and so she lagged behind others. She saw a handsome young man and he talked to her and she talked to him. She was out of her mind. The man was really a bear, but she thought he was a handsome young man. They got married and one night the girl woke up and saw that it was really a bear sleeping beside her. Archetypally bear is the highest expression of the Earth's wisdom. It partakes the earth's wisdom and hence capable of metamorphosis. In *Ramayana* the bear Jambhavan stands for great wisdom, which enables Rama to rescue Sita, the daughter of the earth. It is Jambhavan who asked Hanuman to bring the medicine *sancheevini* to raise the fallen soldiers.

Many narratives of native Canadians were considered private properties of some tribes or initiated elders. 'The Beginning

of the World' is the first of the cycle of fifteen long poems, which constitute the creation myth of Chilliwacks. They were given to the world by chief Khalsatern Sepass to Eloise Street in 1911 to 1915 and translated by her mother.

Long, long ago,
Before everything was,
Saving only the heavens,
From the seat of his golden throne,
The sun-god looked out on the moon-goddess
And found her beautiful.

Hours after hour,
With hopeless love,
He watched the spot where, at evening,
She would sometimes come out to wander
Through her silver garden
In the cool of the dusk.
Far he sent his gaze across the heavens
Until the time came, one day,
When she returned his look of love
And she, too, sat lonely
Turning eyes of wistful longing
Towards her distant lover.

Then their thoughts of love and longing,
Seeking each other,
Met halfway,
Mingled,
Hung suspended in space...
Thus: the beginning of the world.
(as quoted in Petrone 24-25)

The Hindu counterpart of the Canadian myth is Shiva and Parvathi creating the world in their union as the sun and the moon.

Aham Adhithya rupamse chandra masmeevam prakshasare
Samyoga viyoga jagath sthavara jangamasytha.

(Dhikshita III)

Oh! Parvathi, I am the form of the sun
 and you are bearing the form of the Moon
 By our union the Life is created.

Sri Aurobindo calls this union as the sustaining force of the universe.

There he beheld in their mighty union's poise
 The figure of the deathless Two-in-One,
 A single being in two bodies clasped,
 A diarchy of two united souls,
 Seated absorbed in deep creative joy;
 Their trance of bliss sustained the mobile world.
 (Savithri 2. 14)

In the Canadian and Hindu traditions there is an internalising of certain external truths yoking the individual and the universal in an inseparable metaphorical bond. There is also an extension of consciousness over the space and spheres and hence a humanisation of the natural world, as termed by Northrop Frye. Beyond the metaphorical identity and humanisation of the natural world there is a mystery shrouding the poem of both the traditions. The mysterious Canadian medicine man's poem could be understood by Indian tantric art which considers the body as the link between the terrestrial world and the cosmos, the theatre in which the psycho-cosmic drama is enacted.

The Hindu yogic system talks about the Sun and the Moon operating in the human body as Ida, the carrier of lunar current as the left channel and as Pingala in the right channel carrying the solar currents. Pingala is characteristic of Shiva's destructive or purifying energy. The middle one Sushumna has the nature of the Sun and the Moon Nadis (channels). It is believed that from the ascending of the new Moon Ida is dormant for nine days in a fortnight at the time of sunrise and sunset. Pingala is more active during the descending moon cycle from full moon to new moon and operates for nine days in a fortnight at the time of sunrise and sunset. The mystery of the lines

Hour after hour,
 With hopeless love,
 He watched the spot where, at evening,

She would sometimes come out to wander
 Through her silver garden
 in the cool of the dusk (as quoted in Petrone 24)
 is resolved, when it is understood as the time of Pingala's
 domination. The same can be said of the lines
 And she, too, sat lonely,
 Turning eyes of wistful longing
 Toward her distant lover (as quoted in Petrone 24)

which denote the dominant lunar energy in the microcosm as well as the macrocosm.

The first meeting of Jane and Rochester in *Jane Eyre* takes place on such an evening of dominant lunar energy.

... the charm of the long hour lay in its approaching dimness, in the gliding and pale-bearing Sun... on the hill top above me sat the rising moon, pale yet as a cloud, but brightening momentarily, she looked over Hay, which half lost in tree ... but in the absolute hush I could hear plainly its thin murmurs of life. My ear too, felt the flow of currents; in which dales and depths I could not tell ... That evening calm betrayed alike the trinkle of the nearest streams, the *sough* of the most remote. (Bronte 96)

The meeting of the Sun and the Moon on the macrocosm; the inward flow of currents she knows not in which dales and depths and the calm which betrays the trickles of the nearest streams and the *sough* of the most remote clearly show Jane as the yogic aspirant, who would turn inward and also to Mother Nature. Jane feels the solar and the lunar currents of the microcosm and the macrocosm: 'the *sough* of the most remote' shows the latter. At the crucial moment in her life Jane Eyre could hear the cry of Rochester through the medium of the lunar currents on a full moon night.

Vallalar, the Tamil sage poet sings, "The internal Sun stands mingled with the moon and conducts the world" (Vallalar 559). The moon, ever travelling by the left Nadi (Ida), bedews the whole system with her nectar. The Sun, travelling by the right Nadi (Pingala), dries the system (thus moistened by the nectar). When the Sun and the Moon meet at Mulathara, that day is called Amavasya (new moon day). The new moon (amavasya) is the time, when the sun and the moon unite as one, rising together and setting together.

The inference here is the meeting of the sun and the moon on the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels causes (Amavasya) the creation of the earth and the focus on moolathara (the earth centre of the body) respectively. This is what the Sepass poem of Chilliwacks describes as the beginning of the world. The evening when the Moon Goddess "would sometimes come out to wander / through her silver garden / In the cool of the dusk" is the full moon evening, the polar opposite is the New Moon night, when the earth is created. *Sir Lalitha Sahasranama Sthothiram Namavali* ninety seven describes the union of the sun and the moon or Shiva and Parvathi at the six energy centres of the human body. The energy centers are called Chakras and at the first chakra (moolathara) she is praised "Samayanarthastha" (Sastry 132), which means equal in status with the sun or Shiva creating the gross earth centre of the body. The Seapass poem of Chilliwacks calls this state, "being mingled and half-suspended in space, creating the world".

W.B. Yeats' *A Vision* talks about the phases of the moon. Robertes traces the synchronising of man's mental and spiritual growth with those of the phases of the moon. The phases as cradles rock the moon.

For there is no human life at the full or the dark
 From the first crescent the half the dream
 But summons to adventure, and the man
 Is always happy like a bird or a beast;
 But while the moon is rounding towards full
 He follows whatever whims most difficult
 Among whims not impossible, and though scared
 As with cat - o' -nine-tails of the mind
 His body moulded from within his body.

(Yeats 60)

There is no life at the dark. But the world is created and the life starts with the crescent, proceeds forward with mental and physical adventures. The hero is twice born (the first is the physical and the second is the spiritual birth) and he reaches the culmination along with the growing phases of the moon. The eleventh phase brings the struggle between Athene and Achilles; defeat of Hector and the birth of Nietzsche. The hero's phase is the twelfth.

And, yet, twice born, twice buried, grow he must
 before the full moon, helpless as a worm,
 The thirteenth moon but sets the soul at war,
 In its own being, and when that war's begun
 There is no muscle in the arm; and after
 Under the frenzy of the fourteenth moon,
 The soul begins to tremble into stillness,
 To macrocosm die into the labyrinth of itself.

(Yeats 60)

From the full moon, the soul is again caught in the process of coming back to the gross earth during the descending phases. The Tamil sage poetess Avvaiyar prays the elephant headed God, Ganesha (the presiding deity of moolatharam) to initiate her in the mystery of the sun and the moon.

Enlighten me of the state of nector and the movement of the sun
 And the characteristics of the moon
 Which makes the blossoms of water lilies possible

(Avvaiyar 5)

The Hindu sages and the medicine men of Canada are initiated in the mysteries of the sun and the moon. In Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* Ezeulu, the chief Priest of Ulu watches the arrival of the new moon (Crescent) piously. "It was the same at every new moon. He was now an old man but the fear of the new moon which he felt as a little boy hovered round him" (Achebe 2).

Marie Annhart Baker (b.1942, Saultreaux) makes use of the moon, an important traditional symbol to native Canadians, to express her inner being, her potentiality as the fertile female principle of life which takes active part in the silent process of procreation. She sings,

My moon is a deep lake in me
 down there little fishes swim
 Too scared to see the shaking
 Sunlight spears above their stare
 She-bear birthing in my winter womb
 Sleeping till spring to growl again
 Shadows dancing before the nights come
 Tomorrow the wind out there will be just right

May be a quick look to find a tourist dump
 What happened since her earth eyes shut
 Muzzle up and around for scents secure
 Her baby wants her back, it is still cold
 Thy iceface feel of my moon lake
 Slips away as soon as there is more sun
 My moon will grow within me to greet
 Rising bears bringing warm faces to my lips.

(Baker 19)

The title of the poem is 'Moonbear' and it is among the poem in Baker's collection *Being on the Moon*, which includes a cycle of moon poems. The speaker who addresses the moon as "my moon" is aware of herself as an agent of the moon, a greater power which creates being within her. She can be considered as an individual mother or the Earth Mother herself who is under the influence of the moon and the sun. She conceives and gives birth to not human children but she-bears and fishes. The inference is she identifies herself with the Earth, since for the native Canadians menstrual time is known as 'moon time'. The lines "Sunlight appears above my moon lake / Slips away as soon as there is more sun" show the role of the sun in bringing out the life out of her cold lake. The lines, "Tomorrow the wind out there will be just right / May be a quick look to find a tourist dump", could be explained by the Hindu yogic system. Avvaiyar's "Enlighten me the state of nectar and the movement of the sun / And the characteristics of the moon which makes the blossoming at the water - lilies possible" (Avvaiyar 5) show the Prana (Sun) and Apana (Moon) winds in the human bodies associated with Ida and Pingala. In verse eight of *Sat-cakra-Nirupana* it is said that the Prana (which dwells in the heart) draws apana (which dwells in the Mulathara) and vice versa. This is how life in the individual is sustained.

... the two Nadis, the pale Ida or Sasi (Moon) and the red Pingala or Mihira (Sun), which are connected with the eternal breathing from the right to the left nostril and vice-versa. The first, which is feminine (Sakti-rupa) and the embodiment of nectar (Amrta-vigraha), is not the left; and the second, which is "masculine" as being in the nature of Rudra (Raudramika) is on the right. (Woodruffe 111)

The moon is the essence, a self-conscious woman is aware of creativity. Sri Aurobindo's *Savithri* portrays the fasting of Savithri and winning back her husband from the God of Death by her individual merit of chastity. Epilogue - Book XII of Sri Aurobindo tells us about the return of Savithri and Satyavan to the earth to fulfill their mission of creating heaven on the earth with their progeny. Here moon is the symbol of new creation.

Night, splendid with the moon dreaming in heaven
In silver peals, possessed her lumious reign,
She brooded through her stillness on a thought
Deep-guarded by her mystic folds of light,
And in her bosom nursed a greater dawn

(Sri Aurobindo 724)

That is why Diana, the moon Goddess is celebrated as the goddess of chastity. On such a full moon night Jane Eyre could hear the eerie voice of Rochester. Ursula in D.H.Lawrence's *The Rainbow* identifies her inner self with that of the moon. She feels her breasts cleaved to make way for the moonlight.

But her naked self was away there beating upon the moonlight, dashing the moonlight with her breasts and her knees, in meeting, in communion. She half starved to go in actuality, to fling away her clothing and flee away, away from this dark confusion and chaos of people to the hill and the moon ... she sighed in pain. Oh for the coolness and entire liberty and brightness of moon, oh for the cold liberty to be herself, to do entirely as she liked

(Lawrence 139).

In D.H.Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, the moon is away and the woman imagines herself flying towards her to swim in its rays. In Mary Annhart Baker's 'Moon bear', the woman becomes the mother, a containing principle, who feels the moon inside her. In the former, nature contains the woman and in the latter, nature is contained by the woman: the former is the archetypal vision of life and the latter is the anagogic vision, as defined by Northrop Frye. Anagogy is the vision of ancient Hindu Yogis. They visualised the seven logas (worlds) as seven chakras in the body. The vision of 'Moon bear' has closer resemblance to the yogic visualisation of Swathistana Chakra. *Sat-Cakra-Nirupana* describes:

Within it (Swathistana) is the white, shining
 Water region of varuna, of the shape of
 a half-moon, there in, seated on a
 Makara, is Bija vam, stainless and
 White as the autumnal moon.

(Woodruffe 358)

Varuna means water and the element of this chakra is water and the colour of it is light blue. Aquatic realm is the ethos where the day time realities of life die and the woman of the “moon bear” feels the deep pull of the unconscious. In the Hindu mythology water is considered to be the maya (illusory) energy of Vishnu, the preserver of life. Maya is a cosmic term as well as a psychological term, as from the abysmal energy of the cosmic waters individual forms endowed with temporary life and limited ego-consciousness arise and nourished for a time by the vivifying sap and again dissolved into the cosmic form. The lake in ‘Moon bear’ symbolises this. While ‘The beginning of the world’ deals with the earth element, which is born out of the union of the sun and the moon at Amavasya (moonless night) or Moolatharam cosmologically and individually, ‘Moon bear’ subtly talks about the beginning of life in the lunar crescent and elemental water. Archetypally, the crescent is conceived as Naoh’s ark, which carries the life into the future.

Fishes are swimming and she-bears are birthing in the winter womb. Correspondingly there is a fish like being, Makara, in the Swathistana Chakra. It can be associated with the big fish of *Matsya Purana*, where Vishnu assumes the form of a fish to help Satyavrata carry the precious lives and seven Holy Sages to the next Yuga (comprising millions of years) through the waters of dissolution. “The toothed gullet of the aged shark” of T.S.Eliot and Melville’s *Moby Dick* show the fish as the material and spiritual passage between the perished and the forgotten world of the past and the immediate world of the present. The she-bears of Marie Annharte Baker’s poem is the Canadian counterpart of Indian elephants. Like the elephants she-bears are the most primitive animals of the earth partaking the secret of the earth.

The secret of the earth is what a self-conscious woman is aware of, as her monthly efflorescence goes in rhythm with the lunar

cycle creating a body consciousness related to the process of the universe.

“Tantric literature records an extensive body-language, usually known as the science of *Amritakala* (kala meaning fraction) which charts the energising centres of the female body according to the calendar of the light and dark halves of the moon, the *Chandrakala* (moon-fraction). Woman’s body is both a unity and an organism directed towards oneness, wholeness” (Mookerjee 35).

Sun worship is another important cultural symbol which unites Canada and India. Ruby Slipperjack’s *Honour the Sun* (1987) pictures a disintegrated society of alcoholism and Owl the heroine of the novel thinks of the world of her mother. “Honour the Sun, child, just as it comes over the horizon, Honour the Sun, that it may bless you, come another day ...” (as quoted in Petrone 142). In the famous Tamil epic *Chillappathikaram* Kannaki, the chaste wife of Kovalan demands the Sun to tell her whether her husband is a thief. The Sun replies “No! No! No!” The submissive docile woman Kannaki is transformed into a destructive Goddess and her fire of chastity burns the entire kingdom. The initiated brahmin chants *Gayathri mantra* in the presence of the Sun.

In poetry the non-human or natural world is symbolically associated with the human world through similes and metaphors. But the tantric artists find no such dichotomy. In the “songs of Y-Ail-Minth” and “Moon bear” the humanisation of the natural world of Northrop Frye goes along with the naturalisation of the human world, which is characteristic of the Hindu yogic system. In the European cyclical symbolism the emphasis falls on the social cycles and historical cycles. But in Canadian and Hindu literary traditions the cyclical rhythm is applied to the individual.

Though there are diverse literary traditions in native Canadian literature, they are unified by their belief in the dynamic universe in which all things are related. This is the Hindu belief, which believes that each being is part of the living whole. Each being is made up of the five elements and are controlled by the powers of the sun and the moon. The microcosm is regulated by the macrocosm and vice-versa. Native Canadian literature is the expression of this higher spiritual truth. In poetry the non human or natural world is

symbolically associated with the human world through similes and metaphors. But the native Canadians, whatever cultural group they belong, believe like Thirumoolar, the Tamil sage poet, in no such dichotomy.

Andam Pindam Piripadathathu
Idhuve adhuvam; adhuve ithuvam

The macrocosm and the microcosm are indivisible; This is that and that is this.

This Hindu view of life will render newer perspectives to the avenues of unexplored native Canadian writings.

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17

Problematising Culture and History in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*: A Comparison

—Dr. K. Chellappan

According to Linda Hutcheon, while post-modern is paradoxically both self-reflexive and yet grounded in historical and political actuality, post-colonialism and feminism “have distinct political agendas and a theory of agency that allow them to go beyond the post-modern limits of deconstructing existing orthodoxies into the realms of social and political action” (150).

Simon During characterizes post-modern thought as “that thought which refuses to turn the other into the same, but it also recognizes that the other can never speak for itself as the other, whereas post-colonialism is regarded as the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images.” He adds, “The post colonial desire is of decolonized communities for an identity. . . . Obviously it is closely connected to

nationalism, for those communities are often, though not always, nations" (125).

Though to during, the post-colonial drive towards identity centers around language, in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* we find this impulse as a quest for culture and history. In *The Diviners* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* the quest is embodied in the story of a woman protagonist symbolizing a male figure and these two constitute a confederation of the ex-centric.

Both the novels are products of post-colonial cultures, one Canadian and the other Indian. Here the distinction made by Helen Tiffin and Diana Brydon is worth remembering. In countries like Africa and India, the cultural imperialism associated with colonialism took place on the homeground of the colonized people (Hutcheon 31), "whereas in countries like Canada and Australia the English language and culture were transplanted (by settlers, convicts, slave masters) to a foreign territory where the indigenous inhabitants were either annihilated or marginalized" (Hutcheon 135).

The Diviners which has been called the epic of Canada as it envisages a synthesis of the Metis and the Scotch strata of Canadian history representing the centripetal and the centrifugal is the story of a mother of Scotch origin and a Metis daughter, Morag and Pique respectively. The novel begins with the daughter's quest for her Metis father which triggers off the mother's journey into the past in search of her roots. All the time the past is linked with the present and the present *alters* the past as much as the past illuminates the present. The past in the novel is interrogated and invented and hence is constantly changing. While thinking of the missing daughter, Morag writes in her notebook:

A popular misconception is that we can't change the past—everyone is consequently changing their own past, recalling it, revising it. What really happened? A meaningless question. But one I can keep trying to answer knowing there is no answer. (58)

This is exactly the new view of history—as not something already happened but something constantly rediscovering itself in the process of telling it. There are parallels not only between her present moment and the past event but also between her present/past

and her daughter's present / future. In both cases, the individual's story dovetails into the story of a people. Morag is brought up by a scavenger who is significantly called Christie and denied burial in his hometown. His stories of Piper Gunn help her to create a counter myth to the imperialist myth of history and provide the present with the past it needs.

Christie's tales of Piper Gunn reveal "her kin and clan are as good as theirs any day of the week or any century of all time" (47). Their time is not the linear historical time of the colonizer. He also teaches her some of the old songs handed over down the generations, in preference to Wordsworth's 'Daffodils.' He adds; "And you can read about it right here in this part which is called introduction, but the English were liars then as now" (63).

Similar to this is the discovery of the history of the Tonnerres through Skinner, in her schooldays, who represents those half-breeds who were also dispossessed. When all the children sing "The Maple Leaf For Ever," Skinner Tonnerre alone who has the best voice in the class and knows lots of cow-boy songs and the dirty songs is not singing. She realizes: "He comes from nowhere. He isn't anybody" (70). Their friendship and love symbolize the solidarity of the dispossessed and this continues again after she parts with Skeleton Brooke the English professor in protest against his male chauvinism as well as denial of history to her. Imperialism makes inroads into the intimate world of love and Morag reaffirms her Metis link when she again makes love to Skinner which is described as an answer to the past. Skinner's tales of Tonnerre and others give another version of the undercurrent history of real Canada. Morag's development as a creative artist is paralleled by her return to Nuisance Grounds or to Jules Tonnerre.

But in the recovery of history, there is a counter pointing of voices and weaving together of several texts in order to create a counter myth and history. Not only the imperialist linear history is denied but also even the oral history is fictionalized and multiple versions enhance the fictionality of her own history. The imperialist male master texts such as *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* are rewritten as in a typical post-colonial text and the heteroglossia and carnivalisation enhance the polyphony of cultures. However,

Christie tells the garbage to expose the hidden facts of the lives of the bourgeois townsfolk and this revelation is privileged over their myth of respectability and piety" (McLean 102), Morag problematises the monologic discourse of History and "rewrites the Great Tradition (as represented by Shakespeare and Milton) to displace fathering by (m)othering" (Godard 68).

It is Christie's myths that make Morag not to go to Sutherland where her people came from though she goes up to Scotland. She also explains: I don't know that I can explain. It has to do with Christie. The myths are my reality. Something like that. And also, "I don't need to go there because I know now what it was I have to learn here" (390). She concludes that her nation was "Christie's real country. Where I was born" (391). She realizes that one cannot simply inherit nationhood, but must acquire it through myths of suffering and returns to Canada when she is on the verge of her ancestral home. Here is a moment of recognition and reversal, as she recognizes that she really belongs to Canada. Like Tagore's Gora who chooses to be an Indian, when he knows that his roots are Irish, Morag accepts Canada as her true home / homeland. The word "home" is also problematised; the fluid meaning is interrogated in order to be rediscovered. The way up is the way down; "she, like T. S. Eliot, realizes that all journeys away from home are only towards home" (Chellappan 187).

Thus Morag's long journey ends where it begins, here and now in McConneli's Landing, a small town like Manawaka with many of the same characteristics. Laurence herself relates all her activity to a small prairie town "where the world began" and asserts that the novel was concerned with the question of where, when, and why, and the meaning to oneself of the ancestors both the long ago ones and those in remembered history" (Laurence, *Diviners* 330).

Though Morag's daughter has been moving in the opposite direction, her story only continues and complements her mother's. She is also in search of a father as well as his songs. In her case also she has listened to the tales of both the parents about her ancestors. In fact, Jules Tonnerre's ancestor had fought against the Scottish settlers and both share a history of dispossession: they create a common Canadian identity out of the common suffering and the

land that was common. She feels the need for her tales as well as her father. At one point she feels: "I don't know, I don't want to split. I want to be together. But I am not. I don't know where I belong" (350). She achieves a kind of integration only when Morag gives her the pin and the knife symbolic of the two layers of Canadian history which come together in her life as it were. She also gets the tales of mother and the music of the father.

The centripetal movement of Morag from Scotland is supplemented by Pique's movement towards West in search of her Metis father at the end. We can say that the mother and the daughter represent the opposite movements of Canadian history, of ethnicity and national identity though Morag rejects race in favour of nationality as a basis of identity (Kortenaar 21). Pique does not reject her ethnic roots and the novel seems to signify the apparently contradictory pulls of the centrifugal and the centripetal in constructing any identity. In fact even in the case of Morag herself we can see the interplay of the centripetal and the centrifugal simultaneously. Only by going back to her Scottish past is she able to affirm the Canadian present. She also wants to retain her pin until she is gathered to ashes. This need for "familial" continuity is as important as the "new national identity." In that sense, the novel shows the interplay and synthesis of the smaller and larger identities, as well as of the biological and the cultural, and the concept of the nation here is more a process than a product.

If *The Diviners* is an allegory of the Canadian nation and history as seen in the life of a woman and a daughter, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* shows the contradictions in post-colonial India through the life of a Kerala Syrian Christian lady and her twins as well as a dalit. As Ranga Rao, one of the severe critics of Arundhati Roy has put it, Roy's book is the only one I can think of among Indian novels in English, which can be comprehensively described as a protest novel. It is all about atrocities against minorities, Small Things: children and youth, women and untouchables (XIII). Commenting on the Booker Prize citation that "with extraordinary linguistic inventiveness, Roy funnels the history of South India through the North-east of India, to a Bengalee father and Malayalee mother, and, more tantalizingly, the eyes of seven

year old twins," Rao adds: "As it happens, the text informs us that the twins are born in Assam, ... on a day of national humiliation": the national humiliation is the defeat of the Indian forces at the hands of the Chinese in 1962. The history, if there is one, is of India as a whole (XIII). Though in a way it speaks of the contemporary history of India as a whole, we see it as it is enacted in a particular region that is Kerala and that again with reference to a particular house. As Northrop Frye puts it, "Identity is local and regional, rooted in the imagination and in works of culture; unity is national in reference, International in perspective, and rooted in a political feeling" (Frye ii).

In *The God of Small Things*, the Kerala landscape with its evergreen scenery is a pervasive presence from the very beginning:

May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear window panes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. But in early June the South-west monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water with short spells of sharp, glittering sunshine that thrilled children snatch to play with. The countryside turns an immodest green. Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn mossgreen. Pepper vines snake up electric poles. Wild creepers burst through laterite banks and spill across the flooded roads (1).

The scene is one of contrasting colours with anarchic vitality and continuous change and blurring boundaries. There is a suggestion of trespassing and violent embracing of opposites, reflecting the society itself.

Just as Kerala becomes the microcosm of India, Ayemenem the ancient house becomes the microcosm of Kerala and becomes the site and the symbol of a post colonial society haunted by taboos and fears and is almost a participant in the story of transgressions and betrayals. The old house on the hill with its walls that form its trunk and the roof in heat is a sheltering mother who protects its inmates but becomes furious when the children have left with the doors and windows locked and the front veranda bare. Though at times it is an

old man cherishing his little children's foolish pranks, it is predominantly feminine symbolizing the spirit of Kerala life as well as Ammani, the divorced protagonist daughter who returns to the house.

The novel is set in the Kerala of 1960s in the throes of naxalite activity and focuses on the lives of an Anglophile Syrian Christian family and the dalit community. The affair between Ammu and Velutha, the dalit is comparable to Morag's relationship with Jules Tonnerre. Ammu is also a marginalized woman whereas Velutha belongs to the lowest ladder of the society, here the sense of trespassing is emphasized. This is in contrast to her brother Chacko's losing his British wife Margaret and he also invites her home when her British husband dies in an accident. Baby Kochamma, Ammu's aunt had tried to seduce an English priest. When she failed in it, she returned to Ayemenem House. But the hypocrisy and repressive spirit of the society as well as the family leads to the tragic sufferings of Ammu and the death of Velutha. Chacko tells Ammu that she has no claim to the family property and Ammu retorts that the situation is thanks to the male chauvinistic society.

The deep self-division of a post-colonial society is found in and around Ayemenem. If Christianity fails Ammu, Marxism, the new religion of Kerala betrays Velutha. K.V.M Pillai, a typical Marxist leader betrays Velutha first and then exploits his death to induce the workers to strike work. In fact at the end, Baby Kochamma lived as the last survivor in the house symbolizing the taboo-ridden world of a post-colonial consumer society. Her old fears of the Revolution and the Marxist-Leninist Menace had been re-kindled by new television worries about the growing numbers of desperate and dispossessed people. She is the counterfoil to Rahel, Ammu's rebel daughter who was blacklisted in Nazareth convent for decorating a knob of fresh cow dung with small flowers and at Assembly the next morning she was made to look up "depravity" in the Oxford Dictionary and read aloud its meaning.

The novel begins with the arrival of Sophie Mol, the English daughter of Chacko, who is later killed in a boat accident, paying for the collective sin of Ayemenem house. Commenting on the events

which suddenly happened and affect the outcome of whole lives, which have to be resurrected, the author like Morag of *The Diviners* says “little events ordinary things smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning,” and she adds that it should also be argued that it really began thousands of years ago—before the Marxists came, before the western people came, “before three purple-robed Syrian Bishops murdered by the Portuguese were found floating in the sea.” The sea seems to be the silent swallower of all the atrocities of human history and tragedy necessitated by “the Love Laws which lay down who should be loved, and how and how much” (Roy 33).

The novel then portrays the anglophile way of life of the family. Chacko told the twins they were the family of Anglophile, pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace the steps because their footprints have been swept away. He explained to them that the history was like an old house at night and added “to understand history we have to go inside and listen to what they are saying” (52). Estha and Rahel associate it with Kari Saipu’s house on the other side of the river—the English man who had gone mad and shot himself through the head and they call it the History House. This possibly symbolized the colonial history against which Chacko gives the mythical view of India—that of the Earth woman whose forty-six years is condensed. But it is in the history House they soon encounter history in small things and “learned how history negotiates its terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws” (55). They smelled History and never forgot it.

There is a similar contrast between the children enacting Julius Caesar, particularly Estha standing at night on his bed and saying, “Et tu Brute?” and the Kathakali performance of the story of Karna, the illegitimate son of Kunthi, the mother of Pandavas. This probably foreshadows the tragedy of Velutha betrayed by both Marxism and Christianity. And even Kathakali has become the hand-maid of tourism department in the consumer culture. The contradictory culture is revealed in the polyphonus voices of the novel in which English and Malayalam merge very often.

Against this background is shown Velutha's love for Ammu when he sees "things that have been out of bounds so far, obscured by history's blinkers" (176). The description of the affair itself highlights the cultural divide: "they stood there. Skin to skin her brownness against his blackness her softness against his hardness" (334,335). Nevertheless, she realized that "the world they stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars. He moved easily through it" (333, 334). But like Jules Tonnerre and Christie he was denied basic rights and through a conspiracy of Christianity and Marxism he was beaten to death by the policemen for his "involvement" in the death of Sophie Mol. The author comments:

The twins were too young to know that these were only history. Henchmen sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke its laws, feelings of contempt born of inchoate unacknowledged fear - civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness. It was human history, masquerading as god's purpose, revealing herself to an under age audience. (308-9).

At the end Velutha lay folded on the floor abandoned by the God and History, by Marx, by Man, by women, and finally by children (310). The view of history in *The God of Small Things* is focauldian; it portrays circulation of power through subtle small things, but the small things also partake of the divine. Velutha is identified as God of small things just as Christie is subtly linked with Christ in *The Diviners*. Morag also does not love God but "Jesus is another matter" (*The Diviners* 77). In both the novels, water plays a significant role - as a symbol of creativity / divinity as well as history. In *The Diviners* the river is running both ways in the beginning and at the end. Near shore, in the shallows the water was clear, there were the clean and broken clamshells of creatures now dead, and the wavering of the underwater weed forest, and the flicker of small life fishes (453). Here is the reconciliation of life and death; the reference to the sand receiving sun shows the merging of the Goddess of Earth with the God of the Sky. In *The God of Small Things* also the river (of time and history) comes again and again. Crossing the river also happens often particularly by the children,

Ammani and Velutha. Velutha, after the last betrayal by Comrade Pillai is said to have crossed the river “swimming against the current, in the dark and rain, well in time for his blind date with history” (282). Ammu while making love to Velutha is described as the river in spate, wide and deep (337). The literal river in spate swallowed Sophie Mol. The river seems to be an avenging spirit and becomes a mythic God as in *Chemeen*, a Malayalam novel.

Thus in both the novels the river stands for contradictory movement of history and culture. In *The Diviners*, the river finally signifies History’s forward march while going backwards. Morag is able to look ahead into the past as well as look back into the future. It also signifies the contradictory pulls of Canadian culture - the centripetal and the centrifugal, the movements toward the larger Canadian identity as well as its ethnic diversity. But in *The God of Small Things* the river shows the relentless movement of love and fate. Yet, Ammani and Velutha’s “love is a protest against the atrocities of history against the two margins—the women and the untouchables” (*The God of Small Things*) tragically. In both the novels God is portrayed as feminine, human and even subaltern. The revealed Word is last as water and the diviners divine the divine in the small things of Earth.

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Breaking the Tyranny of Silence in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

—Mrs. G. Ruby Davaseeli

The wide variety of literatures in both the countries Canada and India - nurture the growth of a unique identity in each case. Like India's own complex literary heritage, Canadian literature is written in more than one language. It reflects a regionally diverse and multicultural society. Its citizens come from every corner of the globe who retain their own distinctive heritage. Similarly Indian – English literature undeniably is today one of the many modern Indian literatures. The difference between the other Indian literatures and this branch is that other literatures have well-defined communities of readers who speak those languages as their primary languages. The majority of readers of Indian – English literature within India use English as their secondary language.

The comparative method of studying a piece of work involves great scope. In spite of the individual characteristics of a work when compared it takes a new garb and enlightens the readers. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* are the two novels taken for a comparative study. Both

novels deal with the different barriers that enwrap woman. It is a record of the oppression of the protagonist's individuality by curbing her liberty of thought, action and speech.

Margaret Atwood is Canada's most eminent novelist, poet and critic. *The Handmaid's Tale* has won both the Arthur C. Clarke Award for science fiction and the Governor General's Award. She lives in Toronto with the writer Graeme Gibson and their daughter. Shashi Deshpande one of the eminent writers in Indian English literature was born in Dharwad. She was the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1990) for her novel *That Long Silence*. She lives in Bangalore with her pathologist husband and her two sons.

In *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande delineates the delicate swings of mood, the moments of joy and despair of the narrator / protagonist Jaya - a housewife and a failed writer. The consciousness of Jaya is revealed through an exposition of her mind in the process of thinking, feeling and reacting to the stimuli of the moment and situation.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* narrates the tale of quasi-military Republic (Gilead) that chiefly concentrates on human reproduction. She presents a modern form of woman hunting that aims at subjugating woman's power that is her fertility. Atwood a sensitive and consciously self-aware writer explores and expresses the subjugation of women in a patriarchal society. She believes that the silencing of woman and victimization is not only through patriarchal attitudes but also through woman's consciousness. People who are after power cannot tolerate imagination, power to communicate and hope. In order to combat it, one should recognize the source of oppression, express anger and find ways for change.

Offred and Jaya are denied the right to speak, communicate and express. They are even denied of their original names. Moreover they are assigned certain functions and are expected to perform different roles. The intention of this comparative study is to examine the protagonists' need for articulation of their suppressed silence.

The rulers of Gilead use religion to ensure the subjugation of women. The epigraph from Genesis 30:1-3 suggests the patriarchal scheme of creating a sense of unworthiness in women. It also

picturises the complex nature of women in subordinating other women and advocating self effacement. When Gilead first came into being, the very first step of the rulers had been to freeze women's credit cards and bank accounts and take away their jobs and property rights. This results in the destruction of their financial independence and individuality.

Similarly Jaya succumbs and surrenders to Mohan without revolting. Silently she bends herself to his will. Enwrapped by silence in her room, her mind shuttles between the past and the present and thus covers the whole span of her life. Jaya is fighting her own battles. On the one hand, she has to tackle the immediate problems of a likely indictment of her husband on charges of corruption, on the other she wants to examine their relationship. So far it has been dominated by the will of Mohan. Even her career as a writer is in danger since he insists on her writing only "safe stuff" disallowing her earlier impassioned expressions. Now in his hour of need her help is taken for granted. Her teenage children also give her a sense of failure. Her son Rahul is extra-sensitive and has already turned cynical. Her daughter Rati, is a spoilt girl, totally materialistic. Jaya ponders: "I had shaped myself so resolutely to his desires all these years, yet what was I left with now ? Nothing. Just emptiness and silence" (LS 144).

In Gilead a deliberate and systematic attempt is made to obliterate all sense of individuality and identity in women by taking away the names from them. The state cancels the original names of the Handmaids in order to erase their former identity and labels them according to the names of their commanders. It is metaphoric of the silencing of women.

Offred's name is composed of the preposition 'Of' indicating possession and 'Fred' signifying that she is the Handmaid of Fred. Offred says, "My name isn't Offred. I have another name, which nobody uses now because it is forbidden... name is like your telephone number, useful only to others" (HT 79-80). Ofwarren and Ofglen are also re-named indicating that they are the material possession of Warren and Glen respectively.

Like Offred, Jaya too loses her identity and has to forge a new identity and name suiting her husband's desire. Jaya has to fight out

fragmentation of her individuality and also find a meaning if she can. Jaya means victory. Her husband calls her Suhasini meaning “a self smiling, placid motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped” (LS 15). Jaya is not like some modern women who are influenced by western ideas. At the same time, she is not a stereo type of a traditional woman who is confined to the hearth and to man. She does not want to be Sita, Savitri or Draupadi.

Both lose their identity and individualism with the loss of their original name. Name is the only component that makes a person unique. With the loss of their names, they have lost their identity itself.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Gilead succeeds in reducing woman's perception of herself as a mere function. This promotes fragmentation. The women are divided into different classes according to their function and are identified with specific uniform. The house keepers (Marthas) wear green. The aunts (disciplinarians) are given army uniform. Working class (Eco wives) wear red, green and blue striped outfits. The Handmaids wear red gown with nun-like white head gears. They are cloistered but act like mistresses. Their clothes are specially designed to hide bodily contours and the wings and veils are means to prevent her “from seeing and also from living seen” (HT 18).

Thus they are alienated from their own bodies by the elaborate clothes that have to be worn by them at all time, covering them fully in many layers. Offred considers herself “a distorted shadow, a parody of something, some fairytale figure in Red cloak” (HT 19).

The State reduces the handmaids to the slavery status of being mere breeders. “We are two legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices” (HT 146). The handmaid must act as a surrogate mother and bear a child for the aging commander and his barren wife. The Biblical Rachel is their model. The handmaid is declared unwoman if she fails to conceive. As a punishment she is banished to the colonies where women clean up radio active waste as slave labourers. At the same time men are never associated with sterility. Offred comments, “There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, this is the law” (HT 57).

When Offred fails to conceive she experiences anguish and disappointment. Her mind is trained to think of herself only in connection with her womb. In other words only in the child-bearing context and regards herself as a failure when the function is not fulfilled. She prays, "Oh God! Obliterate me. Make me fruitful. Mortify my flesh that I may be multiplied. Let me be fulfilled" (HT 204).

Unlike the Gileadean women, Jaya is not confined within one or two functions. She has multiple functions / roles to play. The individual in Jaya is in crisis on all fronts - as a mother, a wife, a sister, daughter and above all an Indian woman. Jaya is in search of happiness, peace of mind. Apparently she has all but not the sense of belonging. Her feminine dilemma is expressed in her vacillating state of mind, "I could and couldn't do, all the things that were womanly and unwomanly" (LS 83). Jaya is Suhasini and also "Seeta" the pseudonym she assumes to write columns about the plight of the middle class housewife. "Suhasini" and "Seeta" are as Jaya says: "The many selves waiting to be discovered..... each self attached like a Siamese twin to a self of another person, neither able to exist without the other" (LS 69).

She keeps on oscillating in opinions and choices. She leaves her comfortable Church Gate apartment and comes to stay in a small flat in Dadar for the sake of her husband. Away from the routine, she is confronted with difficult truths about her past. She tries to recall the fragments of her self-entangled in her memory. "Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off bits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel," (LS 70).

Mohan has clearly defined views about what a wife may do or may not do. He wanted his wife to be "Suhasini" and not Jaya. So Jaya tried to fit herself into Suhasini's image. At her father's home, Jaya had never restrained herself, instead she had let herself to as their quibbles had always exploded into laughter in which everybody including her father had joined. But Mohan had felt so hurt by her laughter that she dared not laugh in his presence. She gradually learnt that his mood was best met with silence.

She did not like these changes but considering them to be inconsequential, she did not mind them much. But what really upset her was the fact that in order not to damage her marriage, she did things, which she would otherwise be ashamed of doing. The fear of damaging her marriage made her behave absolutely inhuman. For instance she quietly left her neighbour Mr. Kamat's room while he was struggling to breathe his last, instead of attending to him, fearing it would hurt Mohan if the other neighbours gossiped about her presence in Kamat's room.

Offred too has such experience. There is constant invigilation to prevent the forging of relationships among women. Though Offred loves to "fraternize with the marthas she "realises that the patriarchal language has no "Corresponding word that meant to behave like sister"(HT 21). It banishes woman from such healthy relationship as they are fearful of "woman's power." Thus silence and powerlessness go together in the lives of Offred and other handmaids.

In Gilead, women are prohibited from communicating with one another. Offred and other handmaids are muted economically, emotionally and literally. They are forbidden to read and write as it is a man's prerogative. As they are denied self-expression through writing and speaking, they are isolated from the world around them. They try to keep in touch with the world through reading when ever possible and through a secret exchange of oral information with one another.

Similarly in the marital relationship between Jaya and Mohan, there is nothing seriously wrong outwardly. But there is hardly any communication between them verbal / emotional. Temperamental incompatibility between them accounts for their strange silence, Nothing. Nothing between us... nothing between me and Mohan. We live together, but there had been only emptiness between us" (LS 185).

As a writer she went to the extent of changing the very stuff she would have loved to write. Instead of writing about angry women, she wrote the soap opera Seeta stuff, which pleased Mohan. The reason is once when she had received award for one of her writings, Mohan instead of admiring her had felt hurt and sulked,

thinking that his wife had exposed to the world their own relationship. He had been quite incapable of understanding how a writer can aptly transmute experience into artistic creation. As she wrote without emotion, in order to satisfy Mohan, her writings were rejected. As a result she was overcome by a sense of failure. All this made Jaya very restless. Like Offred, Jaya too is not able to express in the beginning. She too feels the suffocation and is shocked and outraged.

The 'Colonies' are symbol of exploitation, isolation and alienation. The barriers that enwrap women in Gilead are many. They are denied of names, speech, communication and are segregated according to their functions. Even the basic freedom to eat and bathe is regulated by others. They are fed only with what the authorities regard as healthy food. Around her ovulation time on the night before the "Ceremony" Martha gives her a bath. After the bath she waits for the ceremony. Feeling completely dehumanized. "I wait, washed, brushed fed like a prize pig" (HT 79).

Their freedom is curtailed as they are spied. Guards are known as Guardians and Spies are renamed as Eyes. They spy on each other and everyone. Through Offred's comment on Ofglen her shopping companion "she is my spy as I am hers" (HT 29). Atwood pictures the mutually distrustful atmosphere in Gilead.

Freedom of speech is a capital offence. According to Offred language is officially forbidden because the ruling class recognizes the power of words as weapons that can free the people from bondage. They are denied books, paper and pens. Only the ruling class has access to books. For minor offences like reading, their arms and legs are chopped off as they are not essential for reproduction. The game of scrabble, a symbol of reading, writing and knowledge is a clandestine activity. "Now it's forbidden for us now it's dangerous. Now it's indecent" (HT 149). Thus words are forbidden in a society governed by Biblical words.

Jaya too faces such barriers. Her freedom is curtailed. The role of a wife curtails women's self-development. The role of a mother does it even more. A woman brought up in orthodox, traditional and rural background has to cope up with so many things. Shashi Deshpande's heroines like Jaya are rebels in a passive manner. Their

voices are lost in wilderness. But Jaya transmutes her rebellion and suffering into an artistic expression. In her there is an inner need for creativity. This creative expression is stifled due to lack of having a 'room of her own'. Social and family pressure stifles her creativity. It holds all creative activities in subservience to her role as a home maker. Jaya says "like a disease, a disability. I had to hide from everyone" (LS 97).

In the so-called ordeal called living, Jaya finds herself at odds with society and undergoes various degrees of psychological transformation. Her urges are silently manifested in moments of crisis and in "Chaotic sequence of events and non events" (LS 167) that made up her life. The reasons for silence are that "it was so much simpler to say nothing. So much less complicated" (LS 99).

Jaya's inner turnoils are so tense and acute that she is not able to express her troubles. She is a woman who faces the sufferings and opposition in the true spirit of ideal Hindu womanhood noted for obedience and loyalty. Jaya broods over the metaphor of the 'Sheltering tree'. "A husband is like a sheltering tree..... without the tree, you are dangerously, Unprotected.....and vulnerable.....and so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies" (LS 32).

To Mohan, it is unwomanly to be angry. He says, "a woman can never be angry, she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There is no room for despair, either. There is only order and routine, today I have to change the sheets tomorrow, scrub the bathrooms the day after, clean the fridge" (LS 147-148).

In total, Offred and Jaya are subjugated by patriarchal power structures. They have lost their names, they are reduced to mere functional elements. Communication is banned. Freedom is curtailed - Freedom to move, talk, express etc. They are reduced to the status of slave. They are debased and dehumanized. As a result they are alienated.

Gileadean women are alienated from their surroundings by the severe restriction on their freedom of movement. Offred's room is a transit camp a prison cell. The use of mirrors, glass window panes, hooks have been dispensed with for safety purpose and also for

dispossessing women of her identity. Bells measure time here. They are also denied the opportunity to create.

Gilead's aim is the total annihilation of women as a person. Offred discovers that even the memory of her has been erased from her daughter's mind as if she had never existed. "I have obliterated for her.....You can see it in her eyes, I am not there.....I can't bear it, to have been erased like that" (HT 240).

Both Offred and Jaya find themselves a pawn in the hands of others. They have to bend according to the will of authorities / husband. When their basic rights to live a life as they love to is at stake, one can expect volcanic eruptions. This is what happens in both the cases. Through all barriers they break creating a new discourse against the chaos of thoughts.

The suppression of the legitimate natural voice, anticipates volcanic vibrations and eruption. Though Offred is initially silenced by Gileadean culture she eventually works her way to freedom through language. Despite the call of authority to forget, to be silent, Offred's response is defiant. Her scripting of the self through memory and language proclaims her triumph and the defeat of patriarchal schemes. Every action of Offred like having a physical relationship with Nick, every symbol like playing of the scrabble, every image like that of the wall, Square, Church, the hint of chosen words like 'Ceremony', 'Salvagings' demonstrates the skill of Atwood in breaking the barriers.

Jaya too is not a mute sufferer. She is perpetually probing and protecting her autonomy. Hers is a silent revolt. Silence seems to be her natural condition. When her husband, Mohan talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husbands which he calls strength, she bursts into rumination, "He saw strength in the woman sitting, silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender" (LS 36).

Both Offred and Jaya are shocked and consider such activities as barbarous. Offred feels her body no longer suited for pleasure. She fills her mind with nostalgic memories of her husband and daughter and strongly desires to escape from her present claustrophobic environment. The handmaids adopt various methods

of escape from their intolerable oppression. Some choose suicide, others through physical flight. Some choose to indulge in rebellious and sabotage activities. Offred too decides to commit suicide, but she considers suicide an idle thing, a timid action.

Language has always been acknowledged as a powerful and perhaps the only weapon at the disposal of those under subjection. Offred and Jaya realise this. Offred is aware that the fruition of the survival wish is possible only through a communication with the outer world that is denied to her. She regrets "If only we could talk to them (Angels) something could be exchanged we still had our bodies" (HT 13). The power of the body language is also seized from the handmaid, as they are segregated from the opposite sex. Despite being constantly warned against the evils of talking and advantages of silence, the handmaids communicate in different ways and defy the vigilant aunts. "We learned to whisper almost without sound. In the semi- darkness we could stretch our arms, when the aunts were not looking and touch each other's hands across space. We learned to lip-read.....In this way we exchanged names from bed to bed : Alma, Janine, Dolores, Moria, June (HT 14). Their new code language is carried to the other with the movement of silent lips, looks, smiles, whistles and winks.

In Offred's room the previous occupant had stealthily scratched a coded message in a cupboard, "Nolite et bastardes carborundirum" (let not the bastards crush you). The language is foreign to her, yet the message is carried, " It pleases me to ponder this message. It pleases me to think that I am communicating with her.....They give me a small joy" (HT 62). Though engulfed by restrictions, Offred communicates with the unknown inscriber and demolishes the barriers of death

Similarly Offred manages to communicate with her former friend Moira who also arrives at the same training centre. Later too Offred and Ofglen discover that they were both 'non-believers'. Inspite of the ban on all communication between the handmaids and the Marthas, one of the housekeepers Cora, develops a liking for Offred. She is even willing to lie for her once. To Offred this step itself is a triumph in itself. "It pleased me that she was willing to lie for me, even in such a small thing, even for her own advantage. It was a link between us" (HT 160).

Offred's eagerness to look upon Serena Joy as an older sister or a motherly figure is shattered by her coldness in the beginning. But later for her own selfish needs she offers to help and arranges clandestine meetings between Offred and Nick. She further promises to get a photograph of Offred's daughter. Small gifts given by Serena and Rita, compliments showered on Rita by Offred are examples of the growing healthy relationship under rigid atmosphere. Women overcome the externally imposed interpersonal alienation and reach out to one another secretly.

Similarly in Jaya's case though life is full of choice, for a married woman the choices are limited. She has no choice left to her save what her husband wills and desires. Unlike other married women slavishly tagged to tradition, Jaya articulates in her own way. She unfurls and unburdens herself to activate the creative impulses smothered within her artistic self. She unburdens her most personal and private thoughts in her writings. This act of self expression becomes for her a creative process. Both Offred and Jaya gain confidence and break all the barriers.

Offred the powerless is empowered by her intellectual competence. Her communicatory skill becomes multi-dimensional. She begins to win the word game of scrabble. In return for clandestinely playing scrabble with her commander, Offred gets precious hand-lotion for her face and hands. But more valuable than that is the intangible gain that she is no longer just an object to him after that, "To him I'm no longer merely a usable body" (HT 172). She discovers that there can be freedom even within the prison. She is able to ask the commander questions, to criticize and even to condescend him. She gives him an insight into the real living conditions and situation of handmaids. She realises the power of pen. As she says, "The pen between my fingers is sensuous the alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of words it contains...Just holding it is envy, I envy the commander his pen. It's one more thing I would like to steal" (HT 196).

Offred lives through her memory. She creates a free space for herself in her flashbacks. She often recalls the views and actions of her mother. She recalls her life with her husband Luke and their daughter. She mourns a holistic love for them. "Nobody dies from lack of sex. It's lack of love....." (HT 113). In this way Offred

endorses a genuine and holistic love for her husband and daughter. Offred apologizes for her frequent flashbacks, "You'll have to forgive me. I am a refuge from the past and like other refuges I go over the customs and habits of being. I've left or been forced to leave behind" (HT 239).

Jaya in the process of self-revelation through writing comes to recognize herself as a failed writer. Her stories had been rejected for lack of genuine feelings which she had laid aside for the sake of her husband. She had also kept away the clamouring voices of women who wanted to find expression, for fear that they may ruffle her domestic life. Her creative urge and artistic enthusiasm frees her from domestic and societal roles. It releases her from emotional and mental trauma. At last she is determined to break that long silence by putting down on paper all that she had suppressed in her seventeen years' silence - that long silence which had reduced her 'self' to fragments, "I am not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I am Mohan's wife. I had thought and cut off the bits of me that refused to be Mohan's wife, Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible. The child hands in pocket, has been with me through the years. She is with me still" (LS 19).

Towards the end of the novel Jaya decides to erase the silence between her and Mohan by speaking and listening. This is how she asserts. It is no longer a mute voice, but a voice with hope and promise. The novel ends with a note of optimism. Jaya says, "We don't change overnight. Its possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that life would be impossible" (LS 193).

Offred's escape along with the underground Mayday resistance group to the underground Female Road to tell her tale is aided by Nick. He is the commander's Chauffer who is the liberating agent of Offred. Nick calls her by her real name and says: "It's May day. go with them" (HT 305). The sign of her identity (real name) is symbolic of breaking the tyranny of silence. She breaks completely the slavery, taking risk as she is " tired of this melodrama. I'm tired of keeping silent" (HT 305).

Thus Offred's narrative stands as a proof that survival is possible through language. For narration confirms existence. The

oral element of the narration is emphasized by Atwood through Offred, "It's also a story I'm telling in my head.....Tell rather than write" (HT 306). Narrating her own story validates existence and makes her exist. It is a tale of survival through communication.

Atwood tells the tale with a sense of commitment to expose how dignity and autonomy of women are negated by anarchic and repressive societies like the republic of Gilead. She also suggests the ways and means to surmount the barriers to woman's individuality and autonomy. She articulates silence by carefully selecting symbolic and meaningful names of places, characters and coins new words to signify the ceremonies.

Shashi Deshpande employs the 'language of the interior' to delineate the inner perception of Jaya who is subtly drawn from inside. She finds her inner routine so disrupted that for the first time in her life she tries to probe into her self to get answers for her existence.

The reminiscences of Jaya evoke a deeper and more tragic sense of vanished time in a calm voice. The experiences become meaningful. The writer distances herself from any intrusion into the psyche of Jaya. Through the sensitive portrayal of the psychic conflicts of Jaya, Shashi Deshpande seems to underline the importance of subverting the established values and replacing them with those values which promote happiness. She neither seeks refuge in an illusionary world nor does she become totally insane, as she has ventilated herself through the process of penning / pinning down her emotions and feelings.

Though patriarchy very meticulously schemes to deprive woman of imagination, the power of communication and hope the creative writer helps to articulate woman's silent discourse to decipher the coded language and liberate the imagination of women.

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Lone Ant in a Flattened Anthill: A Feminist Reading of Sharon Pollock's *Doc*

—Dr. S. Robert Gnanamony

Sharon Pollock's **Doc** is the straightforward dramatisation of the harrowing experience of a woman, who no longer wanted to be marginalized in the male dominated world. The woman Bob tried hard to change the familial culture to eradicate domination of one sex at the expense of the other. Even when feminists like Elaine Showalter were urging the feminist authors all over the world to create a distinct language to bring out the women's experience, creative artists like Sharon Pollock in Canada and the other Western countries were trying to bring out the experience of women in "structures of literature" (Elaine Showalter 403). In this paper I propose to give Pollock's **Doc** (1984) a feminist reading. Feminism hopes for equality. Wherever there is delay in realizing equality, Feminists try to create a critical consciousness among women readers through their writing. It may be remembered that in the past couple of decades, plenty of ideological messages have been in the air both in the West and in the East; the messages targeting women, suggesting them how to be appropriately feminine, docile, and supportive of men. In magazines, sermons, and school textbooks, women are projected as auxiliaries to middleclass men. They are

expected to be a faceless mass of cheerful, nurturant auxiliaries to husbands and fathers who provide them with money and safety. Sharon Pollock rejects such a homogenizing attitude of the patriarchal society of the 1960's and 1970's in her **Doc**. In the play, the playwright presents the angst-ridden Bob, who is driven from pillar-to-post looking for love and understanding and companionship. Leave alone her husband; even her children Katie, Catherine and the boy Robbie have viewed her as deviant and abnormal. Professionally she has just a second-class status. She is a nurse. She is not the owner of her body and psyche. She is considered innately sick. Finding herself in the bottom rungs of the job ladder, she is despised and exploited by her husband. She is like a lone ant in a flattened anthill. In this paper, as a part of feminist reading, I'm also trying to highlight what exactly has afflicted Bob and why she has taken the extreme step of ending her life like another senior woman in the family, (her husband's mother who too had taken her life in a violent way, much more violent than Bob's). Thus far, even in an advanced country like Canada, as Eliane Leslau Silverman observes,

[...] radical change has not taken place. The old hierarchies are still in place. The old definitions of power hold fast; some people, largely middle-class white men, still have power over the lives and futures of others [...]. New visions of community, diverse in its population and sensitive to diverse needs, have barely emerged, let alone changed the culture and its power arrangements (188).

Pollock is not only an artist, she is an autobiographer as well; she uses autobiographies to stage performances of life-stories that take us to the power of storying; and such storying is fundamental to the construction of meaning. Pollock's play **Doc** is her autobiographical representation. Through her characters Doc EV and his daughter Catherine, the playwright as a daughter is attempting to script not only her biography but also the biography of her father and mother. The dual role of biographer/autobiographer in **Doc** is split and shared by EV and Catherine.

As a committed playwright and a tough-minded idealist that she is, Pollock is using the theatre to expose deception, to probe the origins of behaviour, to weigh the truth of a character or situation,

and to determine people's responsibilities for their actions. She is using the theatre, even though she knows that it is impossibility, as an instrument of moral inquiry, to project a better world with a better set of values by which to live. Some of her earlier plays, including **Walsh** (1973), **The Komagata Maru Incident** (1976) and **One Tiger to a Hill** (1980), lean towards simplistic ideas and holier-than-thou didacticism; but her subsequent works—**Generations** (1980), **Blood Relations** (1980), **Whiskey Six Cadenza** (1983) and **Doc** (1984)—treat her subjects and her audiences much more respectfully. Though there are views against this attitude, as Don Rubin observes, "the theatre is not a classroom, the playwright is not a teacher", (134), Pollock emphatically believes that "a good play should provoke intelligent discussion about an issue or theme pertinent to our lives" (cited in Don Rubin 134).

In **Doc** Pollock is trying to present facets of female sensibility, wherewith Bob, the heroine is questioning and probing the links between cultural conditioning, psychosexual determinants and socio-political-economic factors, which govern her destiny. She is also trying to explore and discover alternative ways of survival and empowerment. However her attempts to forge a meaningful relationship with the world outside and even inside end in failure. Pollock also is making an attempt to present the self-referential encounter of parent and child. Catherine, a writer in her mid-thirties, goes home to see her father, E.V. Chalmers, the Doc of the play's title. Recovering from a bad heart attack, he is suddenly feeling old, and is only partly flattered to think that a new hospital is being named after him to honour a lifetime of dedicated service to his community. Catherine's father has been a man of dedicated service throughout his career who has saved innumerable lives but at the expense of his family. His wife Bob loses her tenuous identity inside the straitjacket role of the doctor's wife, becomes an alcoholic and eventually commits suicide; his doctor-friend Oscar turns into a stranger; his mother commits suicide by walking into a train; and his children only know him as a distant figure who sometimes comes home briefly in the middle of the night.

In her program notes for the second production of **Doc**, at Toronto Free Theatre in 1984, Sharon Pollock wrote about how she had dealt with historical and broadly sociological material in her

early plays rather than confronting her own personal past: "Possibly I found my personal history too frightening and confusing to confront directly" (cited in Wasserman 125). The history she dramatizes in **Doc** is based on that of her own family during the years she was growing up in Fredericton, New Brunswick: her father, EV, devoting himself to his work as a respected physician and pillar of the community while her mother slowly came apart at home, and she herself as a child watching the unfolding of this terrible drama of guilt, recrimination, alcoholism and eventual suicide. Describing **Doc** as one of the most powerful and affecting experiences in the Canadian theatre, Ray Conlogue has called it "Sharon Pollock's **Long Day's Journey into Night**" (cited in Wasserman, 125).

Doc was commissioned and first produced by Theatre Calgary in 1984 with Pollock's own daughter Amanda making her professional stage debut in the role of the young daughter Katie. The play was extensively revised for the Toronto Free Theatre production later that year, and has gone on to a number of regional theatres including Manitoba Theatre Centre and the Vancouver Playhouse, where the title role was taken by Pollock's ex-husband Michael Ball. In 1986 the play won Pollock her second Governor General's Award, and she herself directed a production for Theatre New Brunswick under the title **Family Trappings**. Her father attended the opening night and provided program notes.

Much of the play consists of the sometimes shared, sometimes singular memories of the past, as relived by EV and Catherine. The "now" of the play takes place in the house in which Catherine grew up and in which EV now lives alone. When they relive their past we come to know the inscape of Bob's sensibility, and subsumed inborn vigour reflected in her interaction with the other characters. The marginalized Bob's experiential contours of her agitated mind forces her to try alternative lifestyle in order to drive away her boredom and alienation, but of no avail.

The play **Doc** opens with Doctor EV, holding an unopened letter and it makes an ominous presence in almost all the frames of the play. The letter obviously contains a very important family secret. It may throw light on Katie's grandmother's mysterious

death. It is widely believed, "She walked across the train bridge midnight and the train hit her" (Doc Act.I, 130). There are some family members like EV and Katie who are not willing to buy this theory. EV, on his part, believes that his mother "was walking across the Devon bridge [...]" (Act. I.130), when the train hit her. Like him, Katie strongly believes that it was an accident.

Many women in Canada came to understand as in India, that the traditional family is "male-headed" and began to argue for shared responsibility and equality in the private world of the family. EV's mother is one such woman. As she had nurtured her son into a doctor, she had the nostalgic dream of living in the same household of her son with his wife and kids. As it was not materialised in her case, out of desperation, she wrote a letter to her son and jumped across the moving train. Katie does not believe that her grand mother was ill at the time of her death. When Bob says something unpleasant about her mother-in-law (which she usually does with a glee), Katie tells to her face; "You are always lying" (132). Katie even drives her mother away: "Get away from me" (132). Bob, the mother, taunts her husband saying that he has no guts to open the letter. Bob's mother-in-law went to her grave because her life had been one of unredeemed sterility, where even if she had everyone to talk to, in reality she had none. She was treated like a stranger in her own household. Unable to pull on for long in the state of inconsequential anonymity, she walked across the speeding train. The irony of it is that shortly the same fate will overtake Bob too.

As father and daughter are engaged in a chat, the name Paula slips from the father's mouth. Catherine is perplexed and wants to know who the hell Paula is. Dr. EV reveals that Paula was a friend of Catherine's mother. She was suffering from cancer and Catherine's mother was nursing her till the very end. She died in Catherine's room. Another woman named Valma also assisted Catherine's mother. Valma was a heart patient like Dr. EV. The daughter asks the father how is he now. He says he is fine and is taking drugs regularly. Catherine asks her father whether he is afraid of death. Dr. EV answers that he is not because he, "looked death in the face in that goddamn bathroom. It's not easy staring death down with Valma bowling beside you" (137).

It is universally acknowledged that the wife of a man will never bear her husband to have an 'other' in his life. The other in one's life has ruined many a man's life and Western literature has promptly recorded it. Arthur Miller's **Death of a Salesman** is one such play. The other woman in Willie Loman's life has destroyed the bliss in his family and caused his son Biff go astray. When Biff sees his father with a naked tart in a hotel room in Boston and presenting mama's stockings to her, he cries aloud, "You fake, you phony little fake! You fake!" (Miller 1973: 208). The son is too young to understand that "What he does on the road has no connection with his home-life" (Porter 143). In **Doc** the name Valma slips a couple of times from EV's mouth. Catherine is worried. She asks her father straight whether Valma loves him. The father doesn't answer this question straight. He says: "That's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about you and your work and your father dying, that's what we're talking about!" (137). Valma is the other in EV's life. The father sidetracks the conversation and asks Catherine how she is getting along with her boyfriend Dugan. Catherine answers him saying, "It's difficult to keep a relationship going when you're busy" (138). The father tells her that he is longing to have a grandson through Catherine. But Catherine says that she is too old to marry and beget a baby. Moreover, if at all she marries, she'll bring forth only a girl baby. She tries to gag the mouth of her father saying that she doesn't want to talk about it. In the next movement both father and daughter scream aloud. It is obvious that even father and daughter cannot prolong their conversation. Catherine tells her father: "Why do we always end up yelling and screaming, why do we do that?" (138).

Very much concerned about the daughter's welfare, Dr. EV says that if she doesn't marry at the appropriate time, she'll soon "end up a silly old woman with nothing but a cat for company" (139). The daughter taunts the father saying that it looks as though he were living with the cat. She obviously means his nurse Valma. The father doesn't mind her punching words and asks Catherine what exactly she is doing. Catherine answers that she is a writer now. She purposely sidetracks her father and asks him what he is doing there with grandma's sealed letter. So once again their conversation returns to Grandma's unopened letter.

Very often the playwright takes the audience with her into the past. They see Oscar and EV exchange pleasantries between them. We understand from their conversation that they grew up together. It is Dr. EV who inspired Oscar to take up something useful. As Oscar was not showing any interest in the proposals suggested by EV, EV says sarcastically, "I try to look out for you and it's like pissing on a forest fire" (142). Oscar makes his mind clear to him. He says that he has no ambitions or goals in his life. In his words "My old man has my whole life mapped out for me and I know what I'm supposed to do. I'm supposed to read and follow the map. That's it" (142).

When the scene shifts again, EV and Oscar are young and are medicos. EV is seen using an abusive language. He, in fact calls his friend Oscar names, Oscar's pervert behaviour in a whorehouse is interestingly narrated in a soliloquy by EV. When EV goes into the whorehouse in search of Oscar, he is behaving like a sadist with the whore named Janette. See how EV narrates the incident:

He's got Janette tied to the bed, staked right out, naked and nude. He's straddling her but he's fully clothed, winter hat, scarf, boots and all, and he's wielding his blue anatomy pencil. He's drawing all of her vital organs, he's outlining them on her skin with his blue anatomy pencil. He's got her kidneys and her lungs, her trachea and her liver all traced out. Takes four of us to pull him off – me and three massive brutes who've appeared. Janette is so upset they send her back to Riviere-du-Loup for two weeks to recover, Oscar has to turn pimp till he pays back the price of the door, and everyone swears it is the worst goddamn perversion and misuse of a whore ever witnessed in Montreal [...]. (143)

Pollock is at her best in dealing with feminine consciousness. With full of dreams, Bob enters into the life of the doctor. But for the doctor, his beautiful wife is only a mannequin. We come to know the romance of Bob and EV and their go between Oscar and how EV married Bob much against EV's mother. Bob is a nurse. Usually a doctor may not fall for a nurse. But EV does because he is carried away by the irresistible charm of Bob. In fact, Oscar has also taken a fancy for Bob. But since Bob responds EV's love, she becomes EV's wife. From Oscar's conversation with Katie, we understand that EV's mother wants to see her son a specialist. But since Bob

intervenes in the medical career of her son, EV's mother's dream is shattered. She may sometimes not forget Bob for creating such havoc in her son's life. We also come to know that in the beginning of their married life, they have to pass through a lot of tensed moments. EV doesn't want his wife to serve as a nurse in the hospital where he is a surgeon. But Bob doesn't want to give up her job. She wants to be independent. She doesn't want to live on the salary of her husband. Pollock brings out Bob's dilemma carrying her through the high and low seas of life. This kind of attitudinal collision results in a couple of fights at home. Dr. EV doesn't want his wife to be another surgeon's nurse as well. But Bob thinks different. She feels, in her words, "I feel as if I wasted something" (148).

Even though many women long for greater autonomy and a self not wholly dependent on their kinship with a man, whether father or husband, their capacity to make an independent life and their attempt to stand on their own legs is limited. Bob also as far as possible conforms to middleclass domesticity with its sexual rigidity. That's why, in spite of frequent quarrels, EV and Bob didn't legally split. Bob even gives birth to a baby boy, probably in consonance to the wishes of her husband. The child is christened George after EV's dead brother. Strangely enough, Bob does not like the name George. She wants to call him Robbie.

Just as Astha in Manju Kapur's **A Married Woman** felt aridity when her husband Hemant ran after material success, Bob's arid life, to put in a lovely line from **A Married Woman**, "stretched before her, long and dreary" (183). Very often, Oscar and Bob are thrown together. Bob has been longing for love from her husband and from her children. She has lost all sense of marital bliss¹ when EV turns his attention to his office nurse Valma. And so Bob becomes just a pawn in the exchange, passive and exploited. EV is very busy, and Oscar is lazy, and EV doesn't want his wife in the hospital premises. So it becomes easy for Oscar and Bob to come together. It is true that Bob first takes the initiative, as Oscar is sexually not very prone to other women. Bob feels like the woman between two males. She has no social position like her husband and she doesn't want it either. Being only a nurse in the specialty doctor's life, she cannot hope to

increase her husband's influence and status. Bob and Oscar are always in each other's company. Many years after, the grown up daughter of Bob, Catherine suspects that her mother had a relationship with Oscar. She asks Oscar point-blankly: "Did you love my mother, Uncle Oscar?" (151).

It is not to be forgotten that Dr. EV married Bob out of love. There is no reference in the play that she consented to marry him in order to boost up her image or status. She has never tried to work to push herself into positions of real power. No one can say that the moment she gained a little footing, she took advantage of her husband's status. There is no reference in the text that she dominated her husband by a mixture of caresses, promises and menaces. In other words, she has never displayed tendencies of the "petticoat politicians"². (Sylvia Van Kirk 46). Her deep sorrow in the inferiority of her mind is her own botheration to manage and she doesn't want anyone, it includes even her daughters, to have a peep. Marriage, which is one way of tackling and coping with singleness and loneliness and facilitating meaning in life ends in fiasco for Bob. She is like a lone ant in a flattened anthill, deserted by all the other ants; the anthill, her house is also broken and uninhabitable.

Either due to increasing work-pressure, or due to tension in the family life, Dr. EV is not very steady on the steering wheel. Very often his car goes out of road and sometimes lands "in the middle of a goddamn orchard" (152). As Dr. EV has hitched his eyes on the stars, he has no time for his family or for his friends. He is ready to sacrifice anyone or anything to achieve his end. His ambition, as his attitude shows, is to become a number one surgeon in Canada. Every now and then he gets a clue of his drifting family. On those occasions, he would tell his intimate friend Oscar:

And me without a clue in the world as to where I'm headed.
Black as pitch, not a light to be seen, and me driving over
bumps and skirting fences and trying to remember where in
the hell I'm going. Then I catch a glimpse of this little light,
almost like a low-lying star in the sky. (153)

EV wants to achieve success in the world because the world where he lives in is a world of cutthroat competition and he has to compete with a rat race. He doesn't want to be like his father who became smaller and smaller physically and also inwardly, "because

he was nothing no job, no [...] nothing" (153). Nevertheless, the surgeon has achieved success; the price that he has paid is too much. It is true that a new hospital building is going to be named after him. Such an honour may be a dream of an ordinary surgeon. But for EV there is no sensationality in it as he is very much wedded to his hospital. Mostly he is found in the hospital and if he is not there, then one can trace him in the mortuary. He tells his daughter Catherine, "You got to be my age, the only place better than a hospital for meeting people you know is a mortuary [...]" (153).

Like a typical male, EV sees only his wife Bob's feminine body. He wants abject subjection of his wife to him for he wants Bob to service the sexual, emotional, material needs and tastes of him. At the same time, Dr. EV has no time for his wife; she, in turn, drifts from the marital path and becomes chummy with Dr. EV's friend Oscar. Both of them flagrantly violate the family moral codes and are seen in each other's arms. One day as Bob and Oscar are seen kissing, Katie Bob's daughter launches herself at Oscar and Bob and screams aloud, "Don't! You don't!" (153). In the meantime, Dr. EV and his office nurse Valma get closer. When Bob comes to know of this, she becomes furious and she fast becomes a neurotic. She has to be on drugs constantly. Oscar even pleads with Dr. EV to take her to a warm country for three weeks. He even offers to look after Dr. EV's patients. Dr. EV's reply is characteristic of him: "I'd go nuts doing nothing" (155). See how their conversation goes:

EV : Were that to be true, three weeks in the sun couldn't change it.

Oscar : Don't think of her as your wife – think of her as a patient who's married to an insensitive son-of-a-bitch.

EV : I was an insensitive son-of-a-bitch when she met me; I haven't changed.

Oscar : I give up.

EV : O.K. O.K., I'm thinking [...] I'm thinking [...] I'm thinking you like sand and sun, you could take her.

Oscar : I didn't marry her.

EV : You like her.

Oscar : I like her.

EV : She likes you.

Oscar : Listen to yourself! You're asking me to take your wife on a three week vacation to recover from major surgery, do you realize that?

EV : She needs to get away, I can't take the time, you can.

Oscar : It's one thing I'm not gonna do for you.

EV : So do it for her.

Oscar : No. (155, 156).

For Dr. EV and, frankly speaking, to plenty of other males, neither the 'made-for-each-other' social/ commercial concept or the Christian notion of 'one body, one soul' has had any sway. Bob remains just a feminine body to him. He expects her to play an auxiliary role to him and stop with that. For most of the males, the woman remains so. See what Subash Chandra talks about the male notionality of female bodies:

The underlying purpose in creating the 'feminine bodies' is to enhance functional resources of the male, ensure regulation of population (both increase and decrease), and the male in good humour through the use of the feminine body either for sexual activity or relaxing, or (erotic) companionship. The term 'body' here subsumes all that pertains to women's appearance and excludes cerebral dimension. The 'politics' of the body is invariably linked to the feminist question of female identity (172).

Oscar tries to put reason into his friend's mind. He says that if he takes Bob out to an Island, then rumours will fly. But EV says that he doesn't care of hoot for rumours. When the scene shifts, we see Bob and Oscar are seen chatting. She expresses her displeasure at the way her husband is preoccupied with hospital and medicine: "Medical, medical, medical, I don't wanna talk about medical" (157). As she fails to get love from her husband, and as she is mostly alienated in her family circle, she, in a heart-to-heart chat with her daughter Catherine says:

Sometimes I want to scream. I just want to stand there and scream, to hit something, to reach out and smash things – and hit and smash and hit and smash and [...] and then [...]. I would feel very tired and I could lie down and sleep. (157)

The drifting apart of their father and mother affects the children Katie, Catherine and Robbie. Dr. EV doesn't hide his relationship with Valma. Bob gradually loses her grip not only on her husband but also on sleep. She feels more and more constricted. She might also be burdened with some guilt. As a corollary to this, she gradually loses her sleep at night. EV's mother's suicide also is very much in her mind. She tells her daughter Katie, "Your father's mother killed herself [...] " (159).

EV : [...] Why the Christ don't you go to bed.
 Bob : Why the Christ don't you go to bed?
 EV : Go to bed.
 Bob : Gonna go over to Valma's and go to bed? You don't love me, you never loved me! You never loved me.
 EV : Go to bed.
 Bob : You don't even see me. You look at me and there's nobody there.
 You don't see anybody but those stupid stupid people who think you're God. (160).

Just as the guilt-ridden Lady Macbeth cannot sleep, the over-tensed Bob also cannot sleep. Had she experienced a little bit of love, sometimes she would not have taken the extreme step. Lady Macbeth becomes a somnambulist. She walks with a lighted taper in her hand in the broad daylight. In the play **Doc**, Bob has to support her with drugs. Seeing her conduct, we are reminded of Marilyn Monroe, the "golden girl who was like champagne on the screen" (Miller 1987: 242), the Hollywood cine actress and the second wife of America's renowned playwright Arthur Miller. As husband and wife frequently quarrel, and as Marilyn Monroe thinks that her husband doesn't love her, she used to take barbiturates to get sleep. See what Miller talks about her in his autobiography, **Timebends: A Life** :

And in many another situation, her sense of humor would collapse whenever painful images were evoked. Beneath all her insouciance and wit, death was her companion everywhere and at all times, and it may be that its unacknowledged presence was what lent her poignancy, dancing at the edge of oblivion as she was. On one occasion

she takes an overdose of it (barbiturates) and as a result of it her body becomes blue and she dies (242).

Miller has rewritten this incident in his autobiographical play, **After the Fall**. Hear the dialogue between the husband Quentin and his wife Maggie (Marilyn Monroe):

Quentin: Maggie, you want to die and I don't know any more how to prevent it. Maybe it was just my being out in the real world for twenty-four hours again, [...]. I think somebody ought to be with you [...], and simply watches constantly to prevent it.

Maggie: Maybe a little love would prevent it (**Miller. Plays: Two**, 230).

The little love that Maggie/Marilyn Monroe and Bob longed for was not granted to them and so as Maggie/Marilyn became schizoid-paranoid, Bob too became schizoid-paranoid. As the former became afflicted with suicidal tendencies, the latter too felt the same. It is revealing to note that suicide may not simply express disappointment with oneself but hatred for someone else. The tendency to commit suicide is already in the family of Dr. EV. Though the letter that contains the secret of EV's mother's tragic end is not opened anytime in the play, discrete remarks are made every now and then that she committed suicide. She had to take that extreme step because she was alienated. The son (EV) had no time for her and daughter-in-law (Bob) hated her and so she had to take such an extreme step. In the same manner Bob too takes an overdose of sleeping pills. The last straw on the camel's back is the incident of condom. Calling her husband a bastard, she confronted him angrily:

Well I don't care if you want to know or not – I'm gonna tell you. I put the clothes out, put the suit out for the cleaners and I went through his pockets, and do you know what I found, do you know? It was something he didn't need for me, something he wouldn't use with me, because I can't have any more, no, I've been fixed like the goddamn cat or the dog so what the hell did you have it for? (161)

The condom in her husband's pocket sent a wrong signal to the married person; now it was crystal clear that her husband was sleeping with some other woman, quite possibly with Valma. I am reminded of another similar incident in Manju Kapur's **A Married**

Woman. The condom that Astha finds in her husband's suitcase is the prime thing that slowly pushes Astha away from her husband to the lesbian Pipee. See how Manju Kapur presents it and also the reaction of the wife Astha:

[...] while unpacking his suitcase, she came across a condom.

She stared at it for a long time, its implications running through her head. What should she do? Leave it in the suitcase, throw it, or confront him? Who had he slept with, he who was never in any place for very long, it could not be that he was in love—or had a relationship—or maybe he did. Some woman might travel with him, how would she ever know? Maybe the distributor had supplied him with someone; she had read somewhere that women were often a part of business deals (212-213).

Husband and wife not only quarrel verbally but also physically. See the words used by Bob and also the response of her husband EV:

Bob: (*runs at EV*) You bastard! (*Bob strikes at EV's chest. He grabs her wrists.*) You bastard you. (161)

EV's contention is that he cannot bear the shabby behaviour of his wife any longer. To Oscar, he says that he is "not a goddamn machine!!!" (161).

Catherine is scared. Firstly her grandma committed suicide. Now her mummy has done the same. Catherine thinks that next is her turn. Earlier on, when Bob behaved crazily, she was even taken to a psychiatrist for counselling. Katie, her daughter even wished that her mother were dead. She says to her mother: "Someday you will be dead and I'll be happy!" (165).

In the modern city culture, when everybody is busy, nobody is willing to spare any time for the other. Nobody cares for the other and nobody listens to the other. Even though EV and Bob are husband and wife, they are like two birds caged together with a wall in-between. Oscar is trying to diagnose what exactly is the problem that afflicts EV:

Oscar : You never knew her and you don't know me.

EV : How can you say that? I carried you on my back since Grade One cause I liked you, I loved you, like a brother.

Oscar : I could see it in my father, I can see it in you. You got your eye fixed on some goddamn horizon, and while you're striding towards that, you trample on every goddamn thing around you! (166)

Now there is no need to open grandma's letter. So Catherine takes the letter from her father and sets it on fire and puts it into the ash tray.

Sharon Pollock's **Doc** is an exploration of the changing gender-orientations inherent in man-woman relationships. The playwright is making an earnest attempt to delve deep into the crevices of her characters' minds and as she succeeds in her venture, she very successfully bridges the chasm between life and fiction. The reader could also see that Pollock is presenting the contemporary Canadian society and the direction towards which it is heading. As the readers of this play we are very much disturbed to see man-woman incompatibility. When Dr. EV wants to achieve some spectacular success in the medical world, he fails to take his wife with him. The wife also doesn't partake the vision or the dream of her husband. Yet another sad thing Pollock brings before us is extra-marital/sex relationship in the family.

In the play we encounter Pollock's memory and imagination hoarded together into a kind of reservoir. It makes us remember that the play is autobiographical. We see before us a re-enactment of the lived-experience of her trauma wherein the characters were her father, her mother and herself. What Jack Hodgins wrote in **A Passion for Narrative** in another context very well describes Pollock's memory play **Doc**. Considering the writer's craft as a reservoir, Jack Hodgins continues that it is,

[...] all memory and imagination and hoarded experience – as a kind of private aquarium whose thick waters teem with a wondrous population of unusual creatures, all constantly in motion [...]. Swimming past, circling, and swimming past again, they contemplate my presence like malevolent sharks, or cheerful purposes, or comical blowfish, while they anticipate the moment they will swim to the surface and throw themselves into my world. When they do, as often as not it will be for the purpose of nudging story into life. (cited in Struthers 320).

One of the issues that crops up prominently in the course of the play is faithlessness. One surprising thing that the reader finds in the play is that both the husband and wife go astray; they both do not attach much importance to the presence of the other in their married life; even the children know about it. The typical Indian reader from a conservative societal, family background wonders how could such a family be held together. In the Canadian context and cultural scenario, Bob's action may not be viewed very seriously, for the reader could see that she is trying to come out of the stifling male world of enclosures and attics of emotional desolation. Interestingly, none of the characters in the play has felt anytime a pang of guilt.

The family of Dr. EV goes on the rocks. The immensities of Bob's heart shrivel to imagine her husband's faithlessness to her. It lands into a lop-sided love/family triangle, with the husband always longs to be in the company of his office-nurse, Valma. The extroverted Bob becomes an incurable introvert. She even experiments with her husband's friend Oscar to come out of her despair. She has no success. This has angered her daughters and son. Had she had some success, she would not have attempted to commit suicide. The family slowly disintegrates. The Indian reader may think that it is a Western phenomenon. Such incidents are aplenty in Western Literature. In their longing to achieve something spectacular (economic prosperity or name or fame) the Western man readily sacrifices everything. Even their beloved children are sacrificed on the altar of convenience.

Oscar in **Doc** is created after the much-maligned English author Oscar Wilde, author of **The Importance of Being Ernest**. Those who have known Oscar Wilde are aware of the fact that he was not a heterosexual. In his days, he was condemned as a homosexual. Oscar in the play **Doc** is portrayed not as the strong male like EV with heterosexual tendencies. Dr. EV knows his friend in and out. See what he says about Oscar to his own face:

You been a pseudo-doctor for your old man, a pseudo-husband to my wife, and a pseudo-father to my kids! I gave you that. Oscar, like I gave you everything else cause I knew you'd never have the goddamn gumption to get it for yourself! (**Doc.** II, 166)

The play, **Doc**, depicts the life of the Canadian middle class and the higher section of the Canadian society, where the old human

values of the past are found to be meaningless. A critical reading of the play will make anyone see that the values of the 'postmodern present are distressing. In presenting the sliding of a good family towards destruction, Sharon Pollock has penetrated deeply into the psychological, emotional, and moral deviations, which contributes to its decay. Ironically, none of the members of Dr. EV's family is able to establish a meaningful relationship with the other. This may be a typical post-modern phenomenon.

Usually mothers and daughters will have a closer kinship. But, sadly, Bob, the mother of Katie and Catherine has, as the play shows no deep attachment with her daughters. In a couple of times in the play, the daughters openly tell their mother they have no love for her. For instance, Katie tells her mother, "I hate you!" (165). After a few movements, she adds, "I hate you! And I wish that you were dead" (165). When Catherine intervenes, Katie reiterates, "I wish and wish [...]" (165). She doesn't stop with this. When Bob, Oscar and Catherine stand transfixed, Katie gives vent to her feelings again, "Some day you will be dead and I'll be happy!" (165). Reading this we are reminded of Pique's outburst to her mother Morag Gunn when the latter went to visit the ailing daughter in the novel **The Diviners**: "In a low and fierce voice, Pique said, 'Can't you see I despise you? Can't you see I want you to go away? You aren't my mother. I haven't got a mother'" (111).

Pollock's **Doc** seems to talk to us about the frightening erosion of human values and the worth of human personality. As a result of disproportionate technological advancement, and man's prioritising wrong prerogatives, he is depersonalised, and dehumanised and 'thingified'. As Francis J. Lescoe observes, "The callous appraisal of a human being's value in such a technocratic society totally ignores man's dignity and inalienable rights [...]. It stifles, degrades and oppresses him. He is no longer a person but a commodity to be used and exploited by some mass movement, whether social, industrial or political" (17). Sadly, man hardens his heart and his finer feelings are a thing of the past. That is why, though, EV and Catherine relive the family trauma after many years, the father and daughter do not express any sadness for their lapses. By this time, the reader knows that EV and his two daughters are mainly responsible for the untimely tragic death of Bob who longed for their love,

understanding and companionship. It is EV's stiff resistance and cold shoulder that pushed his mother in the void. She had also been longing for love, and companionship not from any other but from her own son and daughter-in-law. Having said all these, it must also be said that Bob is not a paragon of virtue. She is out and out human and so she also committed a few mistakes. But in human life, one has to make a lot of compromises; otherwise, any family will run on the rocks. The family of EV has run on the rocks because none in the family has made any sacrifice and none has made any compromise. Pollock's **Doc** as we have seen is the sad story of a Nurse who thought that her dream would come true when she married a powerful male. But the male, though educated had his own preoccupations and due to that failed to understand her mind. He failed to recognise her even as an individual. As a result, she felt like a lone ant in a dilapidated anthill. She had no strength to recoup and rebuild the anthill. So in order to devalue dominance and suppression, and to put an end to alienation, and to avoid pity from the love-less circle around her, and to register her feminine protest in a dignified manner, she had no other way but to take her own life.

Notes

1. The plight of the married women, whether they are in the East or in the West is the same. The romantic bliss, which the couples usually enjoy in the early part of their courtship/marriage, suddenly gives away to other pursuits. In the case of the male, he runs after economic prosperity, which of course he needs for the stability of the family. But the problem arises when he treats his wife just a body and just a cistern for his periodic ejaculation. Though Bob and Astha face the same situation, Astha escapes from falling into despair by going after sexual diversity, whereas Bob hasn't tried anything of that sort and hence her suicide. This is not to forget her escapades with her husband's friend, Oscar, but let me hasten to add that it has not blossomed in any significant manner and Oscar is not for developing any serious affair with another man's wife.

2. A term used to describe the Indian woman in the early days of colonization who married the white in order to gain social and economic ascendancy.

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Tradition and Transformations: Lizzie Borden's Transformation in Sharon Pollock's *Blood Relations*

— Mrs. P.L. Visalakshi

Literature is a great link for human life. It is a bonding factor, which helps people identify themselves by presenting similar experiences in dissimilar climatic and living conditions. Canadian Literature, which is an amalgamation of different cultures and different sentiments, is replete with a richness that is characteristic of such rare blends. ***Blood Relations*** (1980), a play by English - Canadian dramatist, Sharon Pollock testifies the same.

Sharon Pollock is a multi-faceted theatre personality. She has written several plays for theatre, radio, and television. She has also worked in various other categories such as actor, director, administrator and playwriting instructor. Although she is a native of Calgary, her plays defy to be categorized as regional, since they deal with issues that have a social concern. Her penchant to draw from real-life, past incidents is well known to Pollock's readers. She remains a committed playwright, with an enthusiasm to keep alive the theatre tradition in Canada.

Sharon Pollock's passion for re-structuring, re-visiting or re-presenting past events is embodied in the play *Blood Relations*. The play is actually a revised version of her earlier play entitled 'My Name Is Lizbeth'. Her motive is not to sermonize but to offer true or rather new perspectives to already established notions.

Pollock rates up the sensational case of a New England Spinster, who in 1892 was charged for the ax murders of her father and step-mother. The dramatist's focus is neither on psychological analysis nor on the mental make up of the protagonist Lizzie. On the contrary, it is on the circumstantial aspect— what made the protagonist commit those murders, if at all she had done them. It should be noted that she is not so much concerned with the moral implication, 'How can one ever turn as base as to kill one's own parents?' She is concerned only about the stifling nature of circumstances that have forced Lizzie Borden to follow such a course of action. The playwright endeavours to evoke sympathy for her protagonist and tries to establish that given the circumstances, anyone is capable of murdering. The dramatist strategically maneuvers the reader-spectator to accept her views. It is amazing to note that the reader-spectator, irrespective of his stand at the outset of the play, is drawn, with the play's progress, towards the conviction of the dramatic. This, Pollock is able to achieve by employing, what she calls the "dream thesis", the-play-within-the-play. It is therefore not surprising that Sharon Pollock received the Governor General's Literary Award for Drama in 1981 for *Blood Relations*. The play proved to be a turning point in her career as the shift in her focus, from social issues to matters of a more personal nature could be perceived.

In the play, Pollock relates to the story of the infamous Massachusetts spinster, Lizzie Borden, a good ten years after her acquittal (i.e.) in 1902. The protagonist, charged for the murders, had already been acquitted by then, so dramatizing this incident would not have been a challenge for the dramatist or a matter of interest for theatre – goers. Pollock should have figured this out that is why she rings in an ambiguous tone into the whole episode. Is Lizzie Borden guilty or not? No concrete answer is provided but the reader-spectator is impelled to visualize his own reactions in similar

circumstances and judge for himself. Therein lies a certain fascination and that explains the success of the dramatist.

The play, structured in two acts is “a compelling study of Lizzie Borden” (Bessai 7). It dramatizes the strict conservatism of the nineteenth century and offers a feminist perspective to the then prevailing conditions. Lizzie and her sister Emma live with their father and stepmother in Fall River. Lizzie is under great pressure as she is not free to follow her pursuits in life. She reveals an individualistic trait which does not conform to the accepted norms of the day. She wants economic independence and solitude:

MISS LIZZIE / BRIDGET: I dreamt...some day I'm going to live...in a corner house on the hill I'll have parties, grand parties ... I'll be witty, not biting, but witty. Everyone who is anyone will want to come to my parties and if ... I can't ... live in a corner house in the hill ... I'll live on the farm, all by myself on the farm! (28-29).

Lizzie does not wish to live life in accordance with the dictums of her step-mother. She does not want to settle down in life by entering into wedlock and have children just as women of her age (she is thirty-four, then) were expected to do. Mrs. Borden is quick to snub her by stating that Lizzie had never been asked to be married by any suitor. So this makes Lizzie, in her eyes, a failure. She does not realize that if Lizzie was never asked, it was simply because Lizzie wanted it that way. It is evident, from her conversation with Dr. Patrick, that marriage and a domestic life is not her cup of tea:

LIZZIE. You have no idea how boring it is looking eligible, interested, and alluring, when I feel none of the three (38).

Lizzie enjoys talking to Dr. Patrick, when he calls on them, at their home. She finds him “amusing” and “entertaining” (BR 37). Dr. Patrick is a married man and talking to him is considered a taboo and labeled as ‘illicit conversation’. She is chided by her father for this. He fails to understand that Lizzie considers Dr. Patrick a safe bet and enjoys his company only because he is married. This is her way of expressing rebellion in a society which forbids her from doing things to her liking.

People seek different things for fulfillment. Lizzie would have loved to fend for herself, had she been given the opportunity. The

much sought independence that she had craved for all her life was also denied to her. Many a time she had asked here father to let her do something which was remunerative. It is a pity that her father feels that this is irrational and nonsensical. Instead of letting her work, he wants her to marry Johnny Mac Leod, a widower with three children. Although, she loves her father and tries to act in accordance with his wishes, this is beyond her reasoning. She refuses in an outright manner, "There's something you don't understand, papa. You can't make me do one thing that I don't want to do" (BR 41).

Such convictions of Lizzie's reveal that she is not able to fit in as she lives ahead of her times. Emma, on the other hand, is placed as a foil to Lizzie. Although Emma might nurture desires similar to those of Lizzie, she camouflages them, suppresses them, and is careful not to let them surface. So, as her father says, she is always "a good girl" (BR 35). Lizzie cannot be like Emma, does not want to be like Emma. She can foresee things and in the best of intentions, does not want the farm to be bequeathed to Abigail Borden, her stepmother. She knows that her father is far too 'soft' to handle the conniving duo, Abigail and her brother, Harry. She does not want to fall prey to circumstances after her father's death. She is far more practical — when she utters the word 'die' compels her not to say that word. Emma cannot conceive of a life devoid of the presence of her father more so because that would imply that her life would then be devoid of the protection afforded by a father figure. But Emma would never voice any objection or fight for what should rightfully be hers and Lizzie knows that. She also knows that has reached a saturation point and that her cord of endurance is slowly snapping. She realizes that a change is imminent. She understands that something should be done to change the course of events to happen. Here, she is posed with the question: How is she going to convince her dad and secure for herself the life that she so loves?

Lizzie's transformation forms the crux of the story line in *Blood Relations*. Pollock's emphasis is more on the transformation than on the recognition. Self-discovery and self-recognition are pushed to the periphery and Lizzie's strong conviction to bring in a change is given predominance. She realizes that she has to 'act' if

she has to change the shape of things to come. The two paths open to her, at this juncture, are suicide and murder. She selects the later and that completes her transformation. A docile, repressed, unhappy individual breaks the shackles of horrible subjugation by removing the obstacles to her freedom. Lizzie supposedly hacks to death first her stepmother and then her father. The audience does not see a direct presentation of the event. It is only portrayed through the "dream thesis" where Lizzie acts out the entire drama with her Actress friend who wants to know whether Lizzie is guilty or not. Lizzie takes the role of Bridget, their Irish maid and the Actress is made to perform as Lizzie herself. Lizzie paints the background and lets the Actress act on instinct, helping her with proper responses.

Pollock ensures that the audience' sympathies lie with Lizzie. As the game progresses it becomes serious. The Actress, as Lizzie becomes fully involved and is so absorbed in the role – playing that she begins to identify herself with Lizzie. Act II further intensifies the game. It opens with Ms.Lizzie / Bridget talking about elimination. Elimination of things from the farm, that are 'different', the sick puppy (drowned by her father) of things she had always loved, the birds (killed, brutally, again by her father). The plight of the aging, spinster placed in a helpless situation can thus be comprehended.

Emma hastens the climax, by leaving home, going away on a weekend-trip. She departs at precisely the most trying of times because it is when their dad takes the decision to pass over the ownership of the farmhouse to his wife, their step-mother. The hold over the farm was bound to; thus, pass to Abigail Borden and her brother Harry Wingate. The farm has always meant a great deal for both of them (Emma and Lizzie) – both materially and sentimentally. Lizzie does not want to lay back and let things happen for she does not want to be 'looked after' and be at the mercy of their stepmother. So she resolves to take, according to her, the only way out. Taking advantage of the situation (her father and Harry are away on business, Bridget is outdoors, Emma has already left) she follows her stepmother upstairs with an axe hidden amidst some clothes.

Lizzie descends the staircase some time later, calm and self-possessed. She seems smugly satisfied with herself, but is taken by

surprise at the unexpected arrival of her father. But she has to complete what she had set out to do. So she talks in a placating manner to her father, lures him to sleep and raises the hatchet, very high, to strike him. Then there is a black out. The dream thesis ends here with the ax raised in the hands of the Actress who is in reality role-playing the character of Lizzie.

The setting is once again 1902 and the Actress realizes that Lizzie could have committed the murders she says, "Lizzie, you did" (BR 70). Lizzie's response is simply, "I didn't you did" (BR 70). This response simple, direct, factual and spontaneous brings the play to a close.

The play is Sharon Pollock's response to the paternalistic, dictatorial structure of families. It takes a feminist dimension because the transformation of Lizzie sets her on the path to empowerment. Lizzie is an individual who has braved against all odds to achieve her own ends. As against self-sacrifice she shapes her destiny by transforming herself. The play projects the strong view that murderous thoughts are common to all and that anyone is capable of murder when and if placed under restraint. The Actress realizes this when she is placed under similar circumstances. Pollock is of the view that the reader-spectator too would understand Lizzie's predicament when and if placed under similar claustrophobic, domestic households. She pleads for the cause of Lizzie. It must be pointed out, here, that Pollock is not so much concerned about the moral implication of the savage deed than on the motivations for Lizzie's action. Zimmerman's comment regarding this aspect is "...it (the play) ignores the astounding savagery of the deed. To address that savagery would be to take play in quite another direction "(74). Zimmerman acknowledges that murder is hardly a creative solution and states that the play lights up a new angle when projecting the crisis of individuals placed in constraint.

Thus the transformation of Lizzie Borden reveals her as a resolute, strong-willed person, a woman who defies social conventions and one who thirsts for an empowered, independent life. The reader-spectator is puzzled and intrigued at the ambiguous ending. The dramatist must be given due credit for accomplishing

her task which, was precisely to manage, as Dianne Bessai, in her introductory note to the play says, a “sympathetic reconstruction of Lizzie’s situation as an oppressed Victorian Spinster” (9). The dramatist by evoking sympathy for the protagonist jolts the audience to accept the annihilating nature inherent in human-beings. She also stresses on the importance of respecting the rightful desires of women and on the importance of letting them go, get a life for themselves.

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Traditions and Transformations in David French's *Of the Fields, Lately*★

—Dr. K. Balachandran

David French's award-winning play *Of the Fields, Lately* opened at the Tarragan theatre, Toronto on Saturday, the 29th Sep. 1973. Edward Mullaly writes, "In my end is my beginning." Man is constantly moving from the known to the unknown. And this is what the play [*Of the Fields, Lately*] is all about."¹

Domestic disputes are there in every country and every family. Generally a family without disputes cannot be seen. Every family has a tradition behind it. Similarly transformations are a part of family upbringing. Without tradition there cannot be a history either for a family or a country. These traditions fetch a seal to anyone. They bring name and fame. India has a belief in non-violent tradition though sometimes violence had erupted here and there. There are 4 characters only in this play the family of the Mercers (i) Jacob Mercer, the battling difficult father who was a carpenter (who couldn't become a high ranking official) ; (ii) Mary Mercer, the watchful anxious mother; (iii) Ben Mercer the elder son who is not

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ready to reconcile with the situations, and (iv) Wiff Roach, Ben's uncle. The generation gap between a father and son is a universal occurrence. The contradictions between husband (Jacob) and wife (Mary); father and son; mother and son are the three triangles on which the play is built upon. The play is divided into two Acts and each Act into two scenes.

In the opening scene we meet Ben. Ben has returned home from Regina to Toronto on the occasion of the death and funeral of his aunt Dot. His address to the audience, "It takes many incidents to build a wall between two men... sometimes you're not aware of the building of the wall... It starts very early, as it did with my father and me, very early" (p. 485), strikes the keynote of the play - the artificial wall is created knowingly or unknowingly between a father and son. This is termed as the Generation gap. Elders don't understand the youngsters and the youngsters don't respect the elders. Where lies the remedy? Ben himself tells, "Time would not level it... only death." This is not only Ben's word but it seems to be the playwright's (David French's) also. Our question is--couldn't it be kicked down? It can be if both the individuals are ready to give and take. It can't be, if both are stubborn. According to Ben only death can bring a change in the individuals. But what is the use after death?

Ben is playing for the championship, which is an act of pride to his father. But Ben did not like his father-ashamed of his dialect, dirty overalls, his bruised fingers, fingernails lined with dirt, teeth yellow as old ivory, his lunch pail symbol of the working man. "No, I wanted a doctor for a father. A lawyer, at least a fireman, and not a carpenter" (p. 485). Is it possible for one to change one's father? The young man's thinking that his father should be a high-ranking official is good; but will it be possible?

In the tied game, because of Ben's vigorous playing his team won. Jacob was happy and shouted, "It's my son." It is the scene of a father becoming immensely happy to see his son in the front line of success. The other players (team mates) lifted Ben upon their shoulders. "I pretended not to see him." Thus he disinherited his father because of his lower status. His father was still sitting on the empty bench even though all people the audience left. Later on he never went to see his son's play.

After nine years' gap Ben returns home and he never gave any hint to his mother too. When she asks "Why did you come home?" he replies, "I liked Aunt Dot I wanted to see you." He never bothers to mention about his father which is not digestible to her. She reminds him : "He lives. here, too. He ain't just a stick of furniture" (p. 488). She suggests that at least he can speak to his father. Ben replies, "I already said hello, what more do you want? He doesn't want to talk to me." She is much worried because of the strained relationship. "Both of you too proud to make the first move. What a pair!" In this way her son's ego prevents from talking to his father; her husband's ego prevents him from talking to their son. How can a mother digest this? All these changes have been brought by education. Education has to make youngsters humble and adjustable but in the case of Ben, it has made him a proud man and non-adjustable even with his father. Is this the fruit of education? "This is the effect of educational differences on the father-son relationship."²

Mary does not want the gap to be widened between them. She does not want to upset him. She advises Ben, "Look, why don't you go in and speak to him? Break the ice. Go on now. And don't forget what I said. No fighting" (p. 489). When he enters the room of his father, he is enquired, "How was your flight?" They look awkwardly at one another. Each waits for the other to speak first and each suffers the discomfort of self-consciousness.

Jacob was recalling how Frederick (though couldn't read or write his own name) was building towers for the Army. So education has nothing much to do with livelihood. He expresses his anguish why didn't he even write letters to him periodically. "You might've wrote more often. Four or five letters ain't much..... we never knowed whether you'd been kidnapped or killed" (p. 490). Ben is contented with his present position - sorting letters at the post office. Ben says it was because he didn't complete his studies in the university. Jacob retorts, "Don't blame me. You didn't have to run off like a common hobo and quit school, just because I struck you once..... How many times did my own father take the skin off me, and I never held a grudge. I never let it ruin my life, a few strokes of the belt" (p. 490). People of those days had tolerated whenever they

were corrected by their parents : but today it is not the tradition ; transformations have creped in. Ben bursts out to his father, "I didn't come home to fight, okay? I came for the funeral."

Jacob has a doubt whether his wife, Mary and his son Ben are scheming anything against him. "What's you two doing in there, Mary - scheming?" She replies, "No, we're not scheming" (p. 491). She advises Ben to get dressed. His father wants him to change his pants for uncle Wiff wanted him for a pall bearer ; to shine his shoes and cut his hair. He complains to his wife that Ben has not come home to see him. She asks him to be civil for Ben has come home just for two days. Again he grieves, "Never even asked me how I was 'T' links more of his Aunt Dot than he do of me" (p. 491). Again he finds fault with his son that even when he was in the hospital he did not get a 'Get Well' card from him.

Jacob who had been sick due to heart ailment was in the hospital and this news Mary didn't share with their son, Ben because it may affect both. "What if he saw you and went into one of his rages? What then? As it was, he had two more attacks in the hospital that almost finished him" (p. 497). Now she wants him to retire at the age of 52 for which he is not ready. He asserts, "I'm a damn good carpenter. Ain't that enough? I never wished to be more." Thus he is satisfied with what he has or God has endowed him with. He doesn't want to be a slave driver. Now only Ben comes to know of his father's heart problem.

When his uncle Wiff meets Ben, the latter complains about his father, "He shouldn't have beat me..... I warned him" (p. 501). Wiff advises him, "Forget it. Stay home and give him a hand. He's worked hard for you all his life. You might do the same in return." Whereas Ben doesn't want to live at home and he likes being on his own. Wiff pinpoints his father's condition "I ain't denying he wants to work but he oughtn't to. He ain't in no shape."

They all have to go to Dot's funeral. Her corpse looks as though she is sleeping. Wiff comments : "Flowers don't smell of the fields lately.... only of the funeral parlour of death" (p. 502). This dialogue seems to be the justification. As long as the flowers are in the fields, they smell of their own odour ; but once when they are away from the fields especially in a funeral parlour, they smell of

death. And when the question of wrapping the corpse of Dot arises Mary recalls the last words of Dot: "Don't let Wiff bury me in my wedding dress." May be it is the tradition of the Canadians not to bury a dead person in the wedding dress ; even in India it is not the custom; only new cloths are used. Wiff recalls nostalgically his first meeting with Dot, thirty-five years ago, and now he wants his wife buried with her wedding dress. He does not want sadness at all.

In the II scene more of their characteristics we can come to know. The dialogue between Jacob and Mary reveals how there is no real love between them, because he made himself a fool by taking liquor which she does not like. She even orders, "Get out of the kitchen.... Go in the other room. Ben wishes to speak to you" (p. 506). But he wants her to accompany, "You come in with me, Mary." She carps at him, "Don't be silly : Go on. He won't bite." This is the relationship between a father and his son in the modern days. But later when Ben offers him a cigarette, he takes one. Ben asks his father as how his father died. He replies at the age of 46 he died of oral cancer. It was a calm death without giving any hardship to anybody. Jacob does not have the guts to speak to his son. He begins, "By the way your mother said you wished to speak to me!" (p. 507). He answers positively and requests his father not to go to work due to his ill health.

Ben wishes to stay home so that his father need not go to job. But Mary reminds him of what he promised and so Jacob asks, "All right, my son, pack your bag, your mother don't want you here" (p. 508). At the same time Jacob tells him that there is a spare bedroom. He can come and go. Neither he nor his mother will interfere. This reveals how he is an ideal father who gives full freedom to his son. Mary reminds Ben that he has to convince him not to work. Ben asserts that he is going to get a job and his father won't have to work. This shows his real concern for his seemingly good but ailing father.

In the conversation between Jacob and Wiff, more things about the dead Dot come to light. Wiff almost adored his wife. She wanted a blue silk dress but he was too stingy. Mary and Jacob like to come to an agreement. But before that Ben reminds them: "Dad, I wanted to stay home so you wouldn't have to work" (p. 512). If all the youngsters feel and speak and act accordingly, like Ben then every

father will be in the seventh heaven. But Jacob reminds her that next Friday he has to quit and before that she has to see the doctor for her problems in her legs. Jacob again asserts, "Believe it or not, Mary, I was looking forward to going back to work" (p. 513) shows his self-respect "I am only fifty-two.... what have I got to live for without my work?" shows his real longing for hard work and he does not want to depend on anybody. John Fraser felt that "the first act is too long – and would benefit from some extremely judicious editing. There is some needless repetition of themes."³

In the Second Act again Wiff asserts his real love which he had for Dot, "Wiff belonged in a cage I never looked at another woman....." Mary tells Ben with much concern that his father kicked and twisted all night... he never cuts his toe-nails..... leans on his shovel. Ben comments that his father looks old and something terrible is happening. Mary wishes that Jacob should not smoke. Jacob quips that the place smells of lilac. Mary tells that if she hadn't sprayed he would have complained—it smelled of cigarettes.

Jacob assures, "I lost my appetite the day I stopped working. A bird could live on less" (p. 518) reveals that working is a must for him and he could eat lesser now. He asks Ben, "What's you staring at? Never seen me face before?" Thus father and son each doesn't see face to face the other. He has an obsession that he is spied on by his wife and son. He is irritated: "I ain't some specimen under glass, Mary.... Then don't watch me like a goddamn hawk" (p. 518). He is very adamant in going to work. She is ready to pack his lunch pail if he likes, inspite of his bad health.

In the second scene, Mary and Ben discuss Jacob issue - he always returns home by 5 o'clock. She does not know where to reach him in case of an emergency. If she rings to him to know, he'll get angry; it makes him feel foolish, in front of other men. She advises her son: "Well, the best way you can help your father is get a job" (p. 521). He tells her that in Regina he ran into the library (to get out of the cold on his way home from the post-office) where he saw a girl behind the desk. "The most beautiful girl I've ever seen. So I picked up a book, any book, just as an excuse to hang around.... I did that for weeks every day except Sunday. I'd go to the library after work and read and look at this girl. Even gave her a name;

Sarah" (p. 521). He was too shy to speak to her and one day she wasn't there. He didn't know what happened to her. He kept going for weeks together, hoping to see her again and realized that he was going there just for the books. His mother requests him not to tell this to his father for he'd have a fit. Both are perturbed because he has not returned home who used to return by that time. Though he is a good driver he needs glasses but he does not wear. Wiff intervenes to say that they have done the right thing, persuading Jacob to stay home. But Ben disagrees, "Well, he'll die if he stays home. At least if he went to work he could keep a little self-respect" (p. 522). Thus he cautions his relatives about his father's self-respect. Luckily Jacob returns home. As a dutiful wife she is ready to serve him macaroni and cheese. But he does not feel hungry. He spells out, "Doing nothing takes the good right out of me." This is not only his stand but it sounds as one of the themes of the play. One has to be active ; remaining passive (doing nothing) will make one lazy.

There were bruises and cut on his left cheek. On continuous questioning he tells her that he went after Ike Squires to the beer parlour instead of the funeral parlour. Wiff intervenes and tells what he did that morning. He went to the cemetery. Last night "I bent over Dot's casket and kissed her cold lips because she was there in body if not in spirit. Dot's *dead*. Dead. The word itself was like a nail in me own coffin. Tomorrow I'll never see her face again even in death. In time I'd forget what she even looked like.... So I had a good cry right there in the cemetery, as much for myself as for her. I suppose, the first tears I shed since she died..... And then I got in the car and drove home" (pp. 524-525).

Jacob narrates to Mary how he got the bruises and cut on his cheek. When he went to the beer parlour, Ike Squires criticised that the drink is on him. He wanted Ike to eat his words. Since he didn't do, there was an altercation. Now he admits that he is a workhorse. "It's a crime not to have a smile on my face every blessed morning" (p. 527). Now only he realizes his mistake he did not begin his day with a smile but with a punch of hatred. This is the philosophy, which the dramatist wants to convey through his mouth. So it is good if everyone smiles in the morning so that there will not be only hatred, enmity and discord. After all a smile won't cost any money

but only the good mentality, good heart and good attitude towards others. Though he spoke sensibly, immediately he asked, "Well, don't you come to my funeral?" (527). This sounds strange because he is in death obsession sense and his wife sensed that still he is not fit to work. "Who ain't fit" retorts Jacob. She replies "And I'm in no hurry to be a widow, even if Ben's intent on killing you." He is not ready to accept what all she says, "I can still work as good as Wiff...." and what she speaks is contrary. Again she cautions him with his tool box he is in a fit of coughing. On cold morning he can't breathe. "Even the wind can take your breath away when you goes outside.... what if you had a sudden pain in your chest? Do you t'ink I wants to be sick with worry every day you set off for the job, not knowing whether you'll be back or not?" (p. 528). What she spoke is the reality and the truth to be faced. She bursts out: "If anyone wants supper it's on the table. I'm going to lie down. He can battle all he wants to, Ben, we're all up against the same enemy: time" (p. 528). So what she has been fearing all these days, she has spoken frankly which shows a wife's real concern for her life partner. The three words "same enemy: time" are very powerful. Is it good time or bad time? Everything depends upon how one takes it. Think positively and make the time as friend and if one thinks and acts negatively the time is made as an enemy. As a proverb says "The good and bad are not coming from others. Everything as we do."

Jacob calls Ben and speaks "one minute you was willing to stay, the next you wasn't" and wants him to tell the truth. Ben accepts that he likes a girl who is beautiful and works in a library. He asks him to bring her home next time he comes. Ben assures him, so Jacob gives hope to Ben in his love affair. "Don't stay away so long. Your mother worries" reflect not only the concern of a responsible father and but also of a dutiful and affectionate mother. Thus Jacob is presented as a "self-made man who stubbornly clings to the image of his humble origin."⁴

In the last speech to the audience, Ben has the realization "Seven weeks later I took another jet home and stood in a winter cemetery.... I never did get any closer to my father, though I had learned to take him seriously as a man, not an obstacle. But that wall was still there, a little cracked may be, but still dividing us, still waiting to be toppled...." (p. 529). Still he has not the guts to ask his

father, "How did you like the game?" for he himself disinherited his father then. "There is always the danger of personality conflicts straining the family ties."⁵ But people should not be too stubborn to press that his or her side is true and others are wrong. One should have the patience to listen to others and accept if there is truth and reject if there is no truth. But time is fleeting. Only after certain period maturity dawns, truth is understood, realization blossoms. "Wiff underlines the play's main theme. The loss of his wife made him conscious of the transitoriness of their lives, that the flowers of the field soon become those of the funeral parlour."⁶ The play emphasises that "in the midst of life we are in death."⁷ David French's characters are "very real human beings."⁸ Urjo Kareda writes: "David French brings out to an understanding of the interpretation of death and pride, love and fury."⁹ Bob Allen comments, "The style is highly naturalistic and deals with a traumatic family situation."¹⁰

Transformations have come for the better. Now the father is happy and contented because he has made his son realize his duties to his parents; Ben's mother goes to bed with the contentment that she has made her husband realize his position and act accordingly; also made her son realize their (parents') condition and how he has to act tactfully. What else can be done in a family? If the parents and children behave tactfully, understand each other then, happiness is with them and heaven is in their family. No more, tension and misunderstanding. Peace and joy to everybody!

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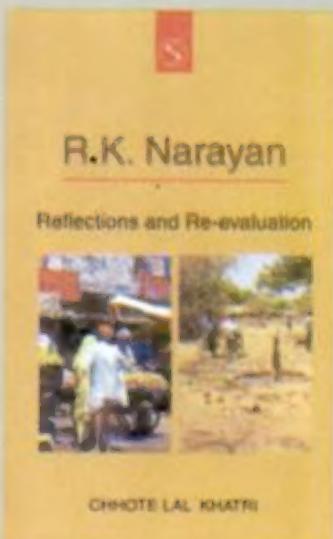
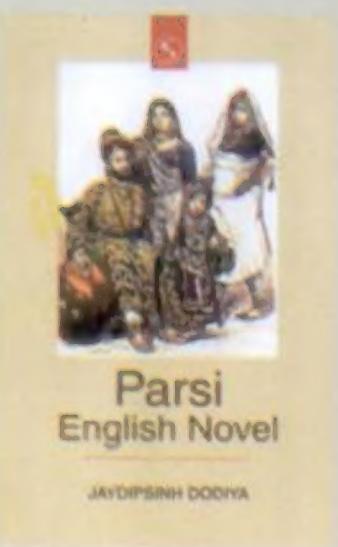
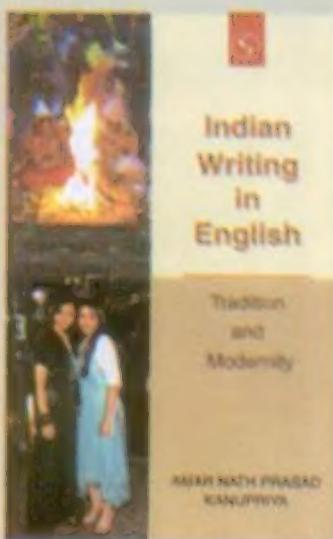
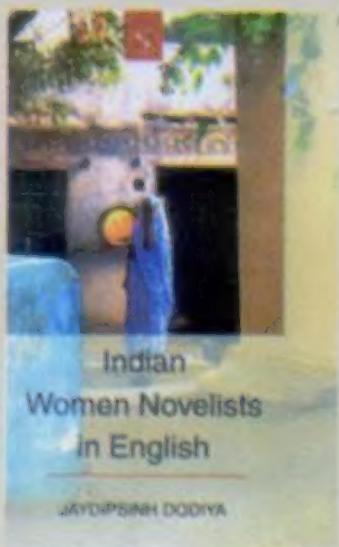
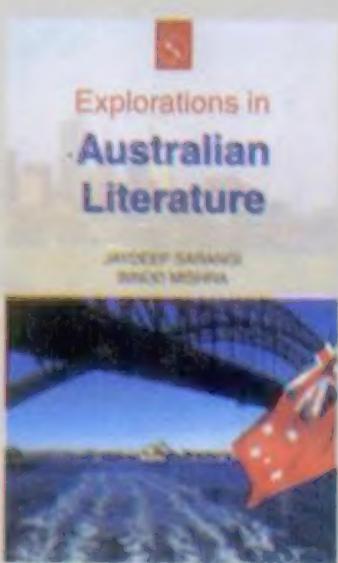
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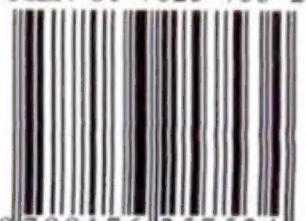
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